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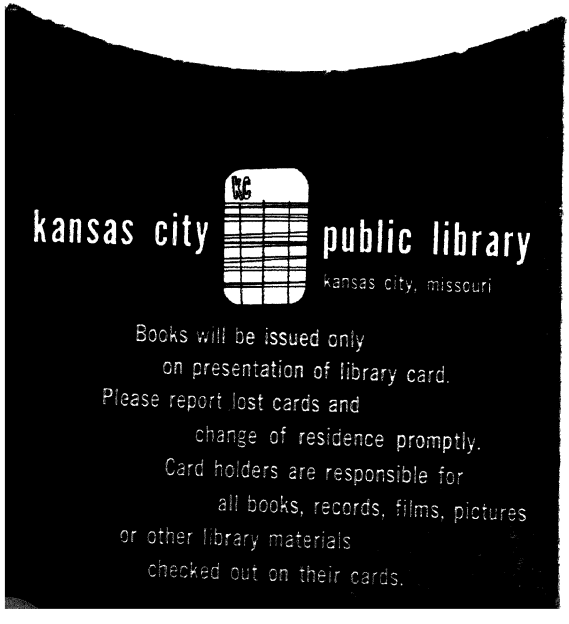

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THE MASKS OF WAR

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BY GEORGE LANGELAAN

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THE MASKS OF WAR

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1

Everyone in the outfit was smiling; even our sergeant major had stopped grumbling. The cold war, the "war of nerves," as the French called it, was over. As usual, the Germans had made the "ghastly mistake" of invading Belgium, and we were now going to show them what real war was like, the war of muscle and blood and guts . . . and glory, of course.

A few hours after Hitler had launched his great advance Belgian gendarmes had swung open their clumsy barbed-wire fences along the French frontier, and we had poured in to race through beflagged towns and villages to meet the Hun.

We had not yet met the Hun, and as we moved east the flow of refugees moving west grew thicker and thicker, and we had finally ceased moving. For two days now the Headquarters of the Nth Division had been settling down in a delightful château in the woods of La Hulpe, east of Brussels. All the main roads and, come to that, all the secondary roads were just a moving mass of refugees, but our troops and great truckloads of ammunition were still moving east, therefore in the right direction, and everything was as it should be on a lovely spring day.

Breakfast was being served in the main drawing room of the château. At the long table at the end of which sat the colonel, stiff in their brand-new battle-dress uniforms, a dozen officers were eating silently. Most of them were *regulars* whose graying temples and mahogany, finely wrinkled, clear-eyed faces denoted years of service in India or some other hot place. In sharp contrast were the scrubbed

pink faces of junior officers evidently straight out of school with just enough weeks of Sandhurst to allow the growth of ridiculous mustaches. They were clearly outnumbered and relegated to the other end of the table where all the dishes came to them last; but they knew that they would not be outnumbered long—couldn't be with a real war on—and then they would show the blustering old—— Well, they would show the world how to really make this war the very last of all wars.

As usual, Major Korne arrived late. He merely murmured an apology in the colonel's ear and took his seat as the orderly deftly slid a plate of porridge in front of him. With swift silent strokes he spooned it up and caught up with the sausages which were being served.

Major Korne pricked his fork into his sausage, gave it a twist, and then looked over to a young lieutenant facing him.

"Gibbons . . . You are the I.O."

"Yes, sir," answered the lieutenant, nervously stroking his imposing mustache and wondering whether the major's statement was a question, an affirmation, or even perhaps a confirmation. A long time ago —three months exactly—Gibbons had still been the French teacher of a big private school near Liverpool.

"Well, in spite of my personal opinion about intelligence officers——"

"Don't tell me you don't approve of Military Intelligence," interrupted the colonel, waving his mustache into a smile.

"He's quite right if he doesn't," said Captain McCarthy, the Irish doctor who was forever ranting against the English and who maintained that the only reason that made him join up was his still greater dislike of the Germans. "Yes, quite right! For us medical men, for instance, there are three distinct sorts of intelligence, which, in their right order, are: animal, human, and military."

"Quite agree! And since I have no animals or humans handy I hereby ask the representative of Military Intelligence to solve a problem."

"I'll do my best, sir!" stuttered Gibbons, blushing like a girl.

"Right! Listen to this: Twice during the night I heard a lion roar——"

"Really, Korne," again interrupted the colonel. "For a man who has shot . . . how many lions?"

"I'm sure of it, sir. Moreover, it was a hungry lion!" said Major Korne, glaring at Gibbons.

"How the devil do you know? Or is the roar of a hungry lion hollower because of its empty belly?" asked McCarthy.

"Once heard, never forgotten. A hungry lion goes something like this . . ."

Putting down his cup, Major Korne made a trumpet of his hands and promptly produced a window-shaking roar which, even to the uninitiated, proved that the Metro-Goldwyn growler was very much overfed.

Proud of my one stripe and my rank of acting-unpaid-lance-corporal, I was one of the ten Field Security policemen under the orders of Lieutenant Gibbons. As a British subject living in France, I had joined up in Paris and after a bare four weeks at the Le Mans base had been sent up to the North of France to join the Nth Field Security Section. Excepting Sergeant Major Billings, all my colleagues spoke French or German, or both French and German quite well, and somehow I gathered that the security of the British Expeditionary Force in general, and our divisional headquarters in particular, depended very much on our work and reports.

We were rather proud of our green-for-Intelligence flash on each shoulder. This seemed to draw respect and consideration in many quarters and had the great advantage of closing mouths wherever and whenever we appeared, especially the mouths of some civilians who had a definite tendency to question Tommies—we were still Tommies in those days.

I came smartly to attention, and my forage cap slid off my head before I could salute Lieutenant Gibbons as he entered our small office. I could never understand by what miracle other soldiers managed to keep their forage caps at the most rakish angles and not merely just march around, but stamp their feet too! I never could. Later on, one of my real joys was to be allowed to wear a peak cap which gave me a homely bus-conductor look rather than the Serbian

refugee aspect the forage cap gave me, no matter what I did to it and regardless of the number of pins stuck in forbidden spots.

"Anything to report?" asked Lieutenant Gibbons.

"Nothing, sir, apart from the usual crazy rumors."

"What rumors?"

"Oh . . . enemy parachutists all over the place and, better still, hungry tigers being parachuted into the woods at night in order to start a panic among the refugees."

"What!"

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"Did you say tigers? Major Korne swears he heard a lion last night."

"Sir . . . you don't honestly believe . . . ?"

"I don't believe anything. Start an inquiry. Question passing refugees, see the Belgian police, and . . . well . . . turn in a report by this afternoon."

Just then a dispatch rider stamped in, saluted, and handed the lieutenant a message.

"You are very white," said Gibbons, opening the message. "Had an accident or something?"

"No, sir. But when I stopped at the crossroads in the woods half a mile from here, a lion looked at me from behind a bush."

"What!"

"Yes, sir . . . looked me straight in the face!"

Within a matter of seconds we had kicked up our motor bikes and were tearing down the road after Gibbons in his little Austin.

"It was there, sir . . . Yes, right in that very bush!" shouted the dispatch rider, revving up his bike, ready to flee.

"Stop that confounded noise!" shouted Gibbons, getting bravely out of his car. "Let's look around a bit."

Bright sunlight was streaming down through the trees, and hundreds of birds were singing happily. Standing by a high wire fence, a donkey was peacefully chewing dandelions and wiggling its long ears.

I had always thought that when a lion was around all animals were struck dumb with fear and ready to panic. Maybe of course European animals not used to jungle life and its dangers might not know this.

Lieutenant Gibbons was carefully scanning the ground, and although I did not know what to look for I also started looking closely

at the moss and damp earth. I had no idea of what the traces of a lion looked like, though I had won my pathfinder's badge when a Boy Scout. However, since I was quite certain there were no lions around, there was no harm in pretending to look.

"Listen, sir! That's him roaring!" gasped the messenger, moving toward his bike.

"Nonsense! That's Major Korne demonstrating again."

The words were hardly out of Gibbons' mouth when an answering roar, this time much closer, silenced the birds and made the donkey run for its life.

No major in any army—not even a sergeant major, come to that—could have made such a noise.

As the roar again thundered through the woods and my hair bristled under my steel helmet I at long last understood why the lion is called the King of Animals.

With drawn pistols we followed the wire fence, then a stone wall that brought us to a road. Gibbons, ahead, was already ringing at a green iron gate on which a brass plate bore the words: PRIVATE ZOO.

Still holding our pistols, we watched a middle-aged lady coming toward us.

"You have come about my beasts, I suppose?"

She assured us that normally her beasts were, if not quite tame, certainly as good as lambs . . .

"But I have not been able to get them their normal rations of raw meat for the last two days, and they were getting nervous . . . especially since a bomb fell near their cages yesterday."

Within a very short time we were back with rifles and orders to shoot all dangerous animals in the zoo.

Crying like a child, the good lady led us round the pits and cages of her little private zoo, explaining how her husband captured wild beasts in different parts of the world and sold them afterward to circuses and zoos.

In separate cages were a lion, two tigers, and a panther and in a nearby pit two brown bears padding silently round and round.

Evidently thinking we were bringing food for them, the beasts had

calmed down at our approach. Gibbons gave us our stations as the good lady, tears streaming down her face, ran into her house.

I found myself facing a lion barely six feet away and looking at me with a calm glare not unlike that of Major Korne. We each had a target and were to fire at Gibbons' order. This was also the first time I was going to fire an Enfield rifle at a live target, and a lion at that.

Sitting on its haunches, my lion was examining me quietly with its large gold-brown eyes, between which I was taking careful aim.

"Fire!" shouted Gibbons.

As the butt of my rifle bruised my shoulder my live target jumped right to the top of its cage with a roar. It came down in a heap of straw, and the whole cage shook as it sprang toward me snarling and howling.

Five times, trembling with shame and fear—yes, fear—five times I fired into the writhing, raving mass before my last bullet, fired into its ear through the bars of the cage, put an end to its misery. I felt sick and miserable.

Later I heard Major Korne explaining that, when facing a lion, you have to aim at the tip of its nose, because the brain is very low in the head, and a bullet, especially an ordinary rifle bullet shot above the nose, is liable to pierce the skull without killing the beast.

Major Korne did not say so, but it was evident that he was furious with Gibbons for not having been invited to our safari.

"Penny for your thoughts," asked Prowse, who had seen me smiling during Major Korne's "explanations."

I did not tell him that I had imagined myself an old lion explaining to a bunch of lion cubs that the major's brain was only just level with his whiskers and that in order not to miss it one should never aim higher than his Adam's apple.

2

Standing by my motor bike against the parapet of the bridge, I was waiting, waiting for nuns—nuns of any sort or order.

The cold war had become just plain war, and we were retreating, but "rumors" were still part of our job, and some pretty fantastic rumors were buzzing around in our sector.

Main roads, country roads, and lanes were covered with an endless moving mass of refugees. Some had horse-drawn carts with enormous loads of furniture, bedding, and cooking utensils; others had just a suitcase on the handlebars of an old bicycle or a bag across the legs of a baby on a shaky pram.

Except for the very old who had seen worse and the very young who did not understand, all had the same dull look of accepted despair as they shuffled along. Day and night they kept moving; now and then some would drop out by the roadside to rest a little, eat out of paper parcels, and fill bottles at pumps, but would soon fall in again.

Occasionally a shout would go up, and as the planes came roaring, whistling down, like a burst blood vessel, the stream of refugees would fan out into the fields and ditches. Sometimes, not always, the rattle of machine guns could be heard as the planes flashed by at treetop level, but the casualties were remarkably few.

Just so that I would not be idle while waiting for nuns—any sort or order—I had been instructed to check the identity papers of all people passing over that particular bridge! Now and then I would pick out lone men, men who looked as though they might be doing some-

thing better than just marching away from the enemy, but I knew how futile the whole business was. Two Belgian gendarmes who had been assigned to help me had long ago left on "more important business."

I had just stopped another refugee with a red blanket—that was one of the rumors: refugees carrying red blankets were spies marking the road for German pilots!—when the usual shout went up.

Carts, bicycles, wheelbarrows were abandoned as one and all ran for the ditches, the fields, anywhere to get off the road and especially off the bridge.

As I crouched down between my bike and the stone parapet, I saw the three planes come skimming down over the hill the other side of the bridge, and as their wings started spitting flashes and a hail of bullets came screeching by, right on the very top of an immense cart-load of bedding, I saw a very old lady holding a pillow over her straw hat, a great square pillow which she calmly put across her knees and patted as the planes went flying on.

People were soon scrambling back onto the road, picking up their loads, and the endless mass started shuffling by again.

The old couple came by a few minutes later. They were somehow different. Unlike the other refugees, they were not walking on the road, but along the narrow pavement. Both neatly dressed, they had no luggage of any sort. They must have been well over seventy and probably closer to eighty. They were walking slowly, arm in arm, most probably just as they had taken their Sunday stroll for years, just as they had walked through life.

Her eyes were bright and shining, and he raised his hat as I stepped off the pavement to let them by.

"*Pardon, Monsieur l'Officier,* is it far to the camp?"

"What camp, monsieur?" I answered, blushing at being taken for an officer.

"The camp for refugees."

I was going to say that I knew of no such camp, when he deliberately winked at me, and I guessed that that was the way he had kept her going.

"I don't know exactly, but not very far," I stammered. "Have you come a very long way?"

"Not very, but we have walked all night and all day, and my wife is a little tired."

"Are you hungry?"

"No. At our age we do not need much food or sleep, and we did get quite a good meal this morning," she said, smiling at him.

"You must be thirsty then," I said, handing them my water bottle.

"No, thank you, monsieur . . . we do not drink."

"It is tea!"

"Really, monsieur . . . we dare not——"

"I will get some more shortly, I assure you."

She opened her big handbag, fumbled in it, and drew out of a silk handkerchief a small china coffee cup, no doubt some family relic.

I filled it with lukewarm tea, and she drank daintily, and as he drank the second cup I slipped a bar of chocolate into her bag and squeezed the hand she raised in protest.

"*Dieu vous bénisse, monsieur,*" she said as he again raised his hat and they walked calmly on, arm in arm.

Without knowing whether or not Lieutenant Gibbons would approve I had taken over traffic duty instead of looking for problematical spies and was stopping, or at least trying to stop, the stream of impossible carts and wagons at the head of the bridge every time one of our trucks appeared, laboring slowly against the human tide. For several hours now, I had been watching the painful, heart-breaking, useless march of people hoping against hope.

A heavy lorry stopped a few seconds and then moved slowly into the crowd on the bridge. I waved it on, and the driver grinned and winked at me as he changed gears onto the road again. Sitting in the back under the open green tarpaulin were two white-faced nuns.

Strange that they should be going in that direction, I thought . . . and then I remembered what I was there for! "Look out for nuns and, if you see any, detain them and bring them in for searching." Those were the orders which had been read out to us that very morning, the result of one of those countless, crazy rumors.

As Field Security policemen we were supposed, not only to investigate rumors, but to trace them right down to their source, of course. No one, to my knowledge, has ever performed this stupendous feat. Just for the fun of it I one day tried to trace a rumor which I had myself

started; my investigation led me everywhere but back to me. But that is another story, as Kipling would have said.

One rumor had it that a nun had been seen shaving, and since a shaving nun could only be a spy our job was simple: have nuns searched for razor blades!

Running back to my motor bike, I kicked it up and roared my way through the slow oncoming stream of humanity and soon caught up with the lorry.

"They're all right, mate," said the driver, grinning at my green shoulder tabs.

"Sorry, you know you're not allowed to give lifts to civilians. You'll have to come back with me."

But he was taking ammunition up to the front—wherever that was—and, thinking of those who might be needing it badly, for all I knew, I let him go after taking his name and number and ordering the two nuns off the lorry.

No, they had no identity papers of any sort. They were returning to their convent at Wavre, which had been turned into a hospital, and their only belongings consisted of a small black Gladstone bag which they had handed to me before being helped down from the lorry.

Both of them seemed tall and skinny under their flowing gowns, and they were certainly well over fifty. One of them had a slight mustache and a small bunch of gray hairs on the side of her chin that made me wonder if, for once, I had not traced the origin of a rumor. But rumor or not, I could not help noticing their extra large black boots and the husky voice of the hairy one.

"Monsieur, why do you arrest us? We must reach our convent before the Germans get there!"

"Monsieur, for the love of God, what are you going to do with us?" asked the other.

"Take you back to Headquarters, *mes Soeurs.*"

"Oh, *mon Dieu,* why?"

"Those are my orders. I'm afraid we shall be obliged to search you."

"Why search us, monsieur?"

"I am sorry, I can't tell you. But come, we are holding up the traffic, talking here."

A small group of refugees had gathered round us, and I knew how

such a crowd might become dangerous, should any of them have heard the rumor about "shaving nuns," and I did not fancy myself trying to prevent their lynching.

"But, monsieur . . . we have nothing to conceal! Here is all we have," said the husky-voiced nun, showing me their little black bag.

"Yes, but I cannot decently search you, can I?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu*, who wants to search us?"

"A simple formality. Orders are orders, you know."

"Who is going to search us, monsieur?"

"Have no fear; you will be searched by ladies of course . . . probably nurses."

"But where, monsieur? And how long is that going to take?"

"I'm sorry, I have no idea. Had you been men, it would of course have been simple," I said, signaling to a lorry going back empty.

"Monsieur," said one of the nuns, laying a thick, black-nailed hand on my arm, "would it not be possible for us to go into any one of these houses where you could have us searched by a lady of the village?"

Though perfectly natural, their insistence gave me a certain uneasy feeling of suspicion.

"No, *mes Soeurs*. I am sorry. Come on, now. Let me help you up into this truck."

"Monsieur . . . We know full well why it is necessary to search us. Let us go into that inn and . . . we will show you—God forgive us—that we are women. But we must get to Wavre soon, monsieur . . . we must!"

My orders were to detain all nuns, but I knew that the only reason for such orders was that crazy rumor, and, after all, if those two nuns were ready to prove that they were not men in disguise then surely the job was done and I could let them go.

"All right," I said.

Before pushing my bike into the passage of the inn I stopped by an old lady sitting on a chair by a pram full of bundles, a pram which she had probably been pushing since dawn if not since the night before. She looked kind and intelligent, and, explaining rapidly what was going to happen, I asked her to assist me.

In spite of her fatigue, she smiled, and, getting slowly to her feet, she pushed her pram into the inn.

Standing between a shiny black stove and a round table covered with a greasy oilcloth still full of crumbs, the two nuns started undressing.

The very atmosphere of the place, with the half-closed shutters, the prayers they were muttering as they performed the most ungodly strip-tease act, the old lady hunched up on a chair, watching silently—all that gave me the strange unpleasant impression that I had seen it all once before, a thousand years ago. Those were not really nuns, but witches preparing for their sabbath ride, and the old hag sitting by was going to smear their bodies with some disgusting, malodorous grease for their broomstick flight through the stormy night.

Disgusted and ashamed, half a dozen times I had been on the point of walking out, if only to put a stop to the horrid form of mental rape I was imposing on those two nuns. But each time the thought that perhaps that was precisely what they were expecting of me, what they were counting on, kept me rooted to the spot.

At last, palms outspread, potbellied in spite of their ribs showing under their flabby breasts, like two hideous nudes out of a Bosch painting, they slowly turned with their eyes closed.

"That's enough. Try to forgive me, *mes Soeurs*," I mumbled as I left the room.

Still praying aloud, they had passed me on the bridge, walking against the eternal stream of refugees, on their way to their convent, perhaps to worse, far worse horrors.

At last as day was falling a dispatch rider turned up. Headquarters would be again moving that night, and I was to return immediately.

As I lugged my heavy motor bike out of the passage where I had left it I found the black leather bag which the two nuns had forgotten.

I pressed on the old-fashioned push-button brass lock, and the bag gaped open. And for a long time I stood gazing at its contents: a coil of wire, rubber gloves, a pair of headphones, pliers, and an automatic!

I was not a very good Field Security policeman, after all.

3

Sergeant Major Billings was a soldier through and through. He was, for me, the link between the two world wars—he had that clean shiny look and, about him, that wonderful smell of leather and tobacco and blanco which I had known so well as a child.

During the war of 1914–18 we lived in Paris, close to the Eiffel Tower. Every Sunday after lunch my father would go out as far as the Invalides Museum and just wait for one or two English soldiers to come by. Mother would get the tea ready, and, sure enough, around four or five o'clock we would hear heavy boots on the stairs and Dad's key in the lock.

Some of these Sunday visitors became regular, and our little Paris home was a home from home for them. There were Jack O'Leary, Alf Simons, and Jimmy Stewart, a wonderful Scot who could recite Burns for hours on end, especially when he had had a drop too many.

All those great awkward, shy men, with their wonderful brass badges and buttons and terribly shiny boots, were, to me, mysterious heroes with a scent, a wonderful scent of their own.

Billings was almost of that generation, and although I was now a grown man my heart went out to Billings because of that, because of his alertness, his fitness . . . and that wonderful mysterious smell of my youth.

Nothing ever surprised Billings, that is . . . nothing except Field Security policemen. Billings, like all really good soldiers, was a sort of magician who could always produce rabbits or chickens or eggs out of nowhere. Billings could repair a motor bike simply by looking at it

and hypnotizing it. Even the first dive-bombing attacks did not seem to surprise him and certainly did not frighten him, but we were a problem from another world for Billings. We were under his orders, and administratively he was supposed to take care of us and look after us, and this he did as though we had all been so many babies.

The state of our uniforms, he considered a perpetual disgrace to the Army. Often at night he would simply push one of us aside to clean his pistol for him. "You're hopeless," he would say. "The minute one of you chaps draws his revolver you become much more dangerous than the whole blooming German Army!"

As to our duties: mooning around markets, talking to people, discussing—yes, discussing!—our reports with Lieutenant Gibbons . . . well, he had long ago given up trying to understand.

Billings not only considered us as children, but civilian children that should never have been allowed in an operational zone, and I am sure that that opinion of Billings also included Lieutenant Gibbons.

Only the day before, when we had evacuated from Tournai, he had hunted desperately all over town, gathering us together like so many sheep. Two of us he could find nowhere, and shells were falling and houses burning, and what with the Germans approaching, Billings was really worried. At last he found the two missing sheep. He found them sitting in the burning ruins of a school, laughing themselves silly over the copybooks of students of English!

Billings was showing me how to repair a puncture—again I had been standing the wrong side of the punctured wheel!—when the man in the nightshirt appeared at the end of the street.

"Christ! There's Romeo again," muttered Billings.

I had heard of Romeo, one of the numerous inmates of the Tournai asylum which the Director had tried to evacuate when told that the town would not be defended. With no transport of any sort available they had left the town on foot, accompanied by their nurses. All had gone well until a couple of German planes had dropped out of nowhere to strafe the road.

"Run! Run into the fields and lay down!" had shouted *Monsieur le Directeur*. Most of his patients had done so with delight, but very few of them came back to the road after the alert.

It was of course natural enough that they should be brought round

to us. People who, during a retreat, do not act like soldiers or refugees become highly suspicious. As a result, we were continually being pestered with poor harmless lunatics found wandering in dangerous places or round gun emplacements, car parks, and even, in one instance, inside divisional headquarters.

We had managed to get a few of them evacuated toward Lille, but Romeo was a very special customer. Billings had given him that name because of the marked affection he showed for Lieutenant Gibbons, who somehow reminded him of his wife Juliette.

Romeo wore a bowler hat but never his shoes, which he always carried in his hands; and though clothes had been found for him, whenever he showed up again he was inevitably in a shirt of some sort.

Twice we had had Romeo evacuated, but each time he had somehow managed to make his way back toward the front. This time he was being marched down the village street by two stalwart military policemen. They both sprang to attention and saluted as their charge went dancing on toward Gibbons, who had just appeared at the door of the abandoned café where we had been installed for the last three days.

"Damnation! That man again!" said Gibbons, dancing round my motor bike as Billings pushed the lunatic into the café. "Why did you bring that man here?"

"Captain McCarthy, with his compliments, sir," explained one of the policemen.

"Captain McCarthy knows full well that that poor man is a raving lunatic."

"Yes, sir. He said to bring him with his compliments to the Field Security Section as the only proper place for him!"

"All right. Thank Captain McCarthy for his kind attention," said Gibbons, biting his mustache but unable to repress a smile. Then, turning to me, he added: "Ask Billings to put him in the cellar with the other lunatics to be evacuated this evening."

Though we still wore green shoulder tabs our work had changed quite a bit during the last few days. A retreating army needs plenty of dispatch riders; it also loses a good deal of such personnel, and, naturally enough, since Headquarters had other things to worry about than the morale of civilian populations and reports on contacts with

the Belgian police; since, moreover, we had motor bicycles which we could by now ride fairly well; and since we knew the country well we soon found ourselves simple dispatch riders.

A major had come down from divisional headquarters, and Gibbons had gathered us together to listen to him. The major had explained that of course none of us was obliged . . . but, necessity . . . all in the same boat . . . must do our best . . . And that was that. No one had said anything after the major's departure except Billings, who was cooking our dinner. He simply considered that that was the end for each of us.

Our work consisted mostly in intercepting convoys and redirecting them—generally westward, establishing liaisons with all sorts of other groups and mobile headquarters. Some of the orders I had thus distributed were grim, and the men who received them had not smiled. A few of those orders, I knew, amounted to death sentences, stand-and-hold-come-what-may orders. Delaying actions were becoming more and more necessary, urgent, and even vital for the general safety of the Expeditionary Force.

One of my first jobs had been to deliver a dispatch to a field hospital hidden away deep in a wood, miles from anywhere, and finding it with the help of a very ancient ordnance map, a map which, for all I knew, might well have been used by Wellington a century before, was no fun.

I finally found what seemed like an abandoned château at the end of a long, overgrown lane and was on the point of moving on when a nurse walked out on the terrace.

No, Colonel X could not see me—he was operating. Would I wait or leave my message?

"Sorry, miss, I was told to hand it to him in person."

"Then you must wait. He won't be very long," she added, handing me a mug of hot tea.

The colonel finally walked in and took my message without a word. He seemed old, even for a colonel, and gently stroked a long white mustache as he read the dispatch.

"Do you know the contents of this message, Corporal?"

"No, sir."

"They want me to evacuate immediately. Well, that is impossible;

I only have heavy casualties here, and there is not one of them can be moved at present. I haven't time to write out a report, but you will tell them just that at Headquarters."

"Yes, sir."

"Can you wait ten minutes?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll see if any of my staff wish to leave. I can spare a truck which you could lead back. Meanwhile, the others may want to write home."

Half an hour later—some of the letters had taken more than ten minutes to write—I left . . . alone.

Swinging back onto the main road a mile from the hospital, I almost collided with a small tank. A man in the open turret waved and shouted something as I swerved by.

I had hardly kicked up my Norton into third when I suddenly remembered what I had seen in a flash on the side of that tank, a black cross! And this time it registered. With a sickening feeling that I was for it any moment, I opened up the throttle and bent down on the handlebars of my roaring motor bike. Even after careering round a couple of bends I still went roaring on dangerously.

"So, you did get back," said the major at Headquarters. "The whole countryside is crawling with them. We thought you must have got captured with that medical outfit."

One of our regular runs, to a command post just outside Tournai, was getting very unpleasant. For the last two days part of the road had been under direct observation of the German gunners. It was a straight run of about a mile and a half which we just had to take.

There were two sharp bends before the straight run, and I usually stopped by a clump of trees to take a look at the road and countryside before making my dash. I did not fancy breaking my neck in a shell hole if I could help it (that of course was my own personal official reason; the real reason was that I needed that breather to fight down my panic).

Just as I slowed down before the clump of trees that morning, I saw a little old lady trotting along the middle of the road with a large wicker basket on her arm.

"Madame! Where are you going? You can't take that road," I said, pulling up just ahead of her. "It is much too dangerous."

"But, monsieur, the Queen is expecting me! And danger or not, I cannot afford to make Her Majesty wait."

There was no one around to whom I could hand over the poor old lunatic, and marching her back was out of the question. Kicking up my bike, I just made my usual dash. Only one shell blew up a lot of earth in a field quite a distance from the road as I neared the end of the run.

"Find a spot for your bike and stick around. We'll have some dispatches for you in a couple of hours," said a young second lieutenant crawling out of a cellar.

A corporal showed me a ditch where I could hide my bike and another cellar where I got some tea.

"Eat when you can, as much as you can, and sleep whenever you get a chance, also as much as you can," Billings kept telling us. I had not undressed for about a week, and in spite of the gunning outside I crawled under a blanket.

"Hey, you! Wake up! Captain wants to know if you can speak the lingo!"

Outside I could hear a high-pitched voice, and as I stepped out of the cellar I recognized the little old lady and her basket.

"Ah! Monsieur, please explain to these *troupiers* that I must see the Queen!"

"Madame, I am sorry, but the Queen has just left," I answered in French.

"Are you sure, monsieur? I am the Princesse de X."

"Quite sure, Your Highness."

"Any idea how we can get rid of her without getting her shot up?" asked the officer to whom I had rapidly explained the situation.

"I'll try, sir."

Turning and bowing to the old lady, I asked her: "Would Your Highness care to ride back with me? I believe that Her Majesty is now in that direction."

Maybe the German observer was not looking. If he was he must have had quite a shock at seeing a dispatch rider tearing along the Tournai road with a little old lady pillion riding, holding grimly onto the dispatch rider with one arm and to a large wicker basket with the other.

Not a shot was fired.

4

"Come in, Corporal," said Lieutenant Gibbons. "Come and take a good look at this map, because I can't give it to you. Sit down."

He turned the map round on the table and lit a cigarette. I bent over the map, sucking at my empty pipe.

"Might as well light it," he said with a grin. "The sergeant major is out on a job."

The map was just another outdated ordnance survey map of the locality, somewhere near the Belgian frontier, north of Lille.

"Can you make out where we are?"

"Here, sir."

"Right. Now look; see that wood there, by that road? . . . Somewhere in there is a battery of sixty-four-pounders."

My knowledge of military technical terms was still somewhat hazy. I knew that a sixty-four-pounder was a gun, but why sixty-four was still for me an unsolved mystery; it seemed too little for the price of the gun and rather too much for that of a shell, I thought.

"Think you can find that wood, Corporal?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, if you once find the wood, finding the battery shouldn't be too difficult."

"No, sir."

"See the C.O. and try to be sympathetic. He and his men seem to be suffering from a bad attack of spy-itis."

It was only quite recently that I had discovered that C.O. meant "commanding officer" and not "colonel, one" or something of that sort.

"Yes, sir. What shall I do?"

"Whatever you think fit," said Gibbons, a thing he would never have dared say in the presence of his sergeant major. "Make out a report if you like; but be back here by this evening, because it looks as if we'll soon be on the move again."

"Backward again, do you think, sir?"

"What do you think?"

Guns were rumbling in the distance as I kicked up my bike. I was glad of the respite from running dispatches to awkward places.

The wood was easy enough to find, but it was some time before I finally found the heavy camouflage nets hung up between trees to conceal the guns.

A sergeant led me down a small ravine to where a tarpaulin was stretched over stacked-up tins.

"Field Security police, sir," said the sergeant, saluting a pair of beautifully polished top boots sticking out from under the tarpaulin.

"Oh, here you are. Sit down, Corporal, sit down. Any more tea, Sergeant?"

The C.O. was a red-faced major with a very bushy white mustache and very bushy white eyebrows. He waited patiently until I had a mug of tea in one hand and a biscuit in the other before saying:

"I wish some of you fellows would stick around here a little instead of riding all over the countryside all day long."

"Sorry, sir. There are only ten of us for the whole divisional area, and most of us are dispatch riders best part of the time."

"I see. Well, listen to this. Twice yesterday and once this morning I had to chase away a priest wandering in these woods. Would you consider that suspicious?"

"All depends, sir. What does he have to say for himself?"

"How should I know! That's your job, I should think."

"Is he still around?"

"Jolly well hope not! And I can't spare any men to go hunting for him, either!"

"No, sir. What was he like?"

"Like a priest, with a long black cassock and a bald pate."

"I see. What did you say to him, sir?"

"I said: 'Alley-oop! Get the devil out of here.' But he didn't seem

to even understand the alley-oop part, which I thought was good French for 'get going.'"

"Are there any other units around here, sir?"

"There again, you ought to know. All I know is that Naafi boys are trying to erect a tent on the other side of the wood."

"Right, sir. I'll take a look round and make a report. Should your suspect——"

"*My* suspect?"

"Sorry, sir. Should that priest come round here again, please detain him and we'll have him picked up."

Probably the local priest trying to be polite, I thought as I made my way through the wood. No, the Naafi people had not seen him, and a farmer I found milking his cows in a nearby barn assured me that the village priest had left two days ago.

Just as I was getting off my bike to report to Lieutenant Gibbons, Billings walked out:

"That battery you have just called on want you back immediately."

"Good Lord, why?"

"You apparently told them to catch a priest, and they have."

"Got him! And I hope you like him," said the artillery major ten minutes later as I leant my bike against a tree close to one of his guns.

A bareheaded priest was tied hand and foot to one of the wheels.

"What was he doing, sir? Why did you tie him up there?"

"Because this time he wanted to 'alley-oop' as soon as we spotted him, and it was quite a bit of bother getting him here."

Bald-headed, small, and fat, the poor *curé* certainly did not look very dangerous. Red with shame and anger, he assured me he had done nothing wrong. His broad Brussels accent, his big watery eyes made me want to smile. No, he had no identity papers. . . . He had left in a hurry with a lot of old people and children of his parish . . . a village near Antwerp. . . . No, he did not know where they had got to. . . . He had lost sight of them in Tournai . . . during a bombardment. . . . No, he had no luggage of any sort. . . . Would he come with me for an identity check up? But of course!

"Do you want an escort, Corporal?" asked the major, who had apparently been understanding most of our conversation.

"No, thank you, sir. I'll ride him back pillion. I'm sure he'll be all right."

"Well, take care he doesn't slit your throat for you. I don't like his looks."

Lieutenant Gibbons bit his mustache to repress a smile when I led my prisoner into his little office at the back of our café.

The priest repeated his story, and we were about to release him and show him the road to Lille, when Gibbons pointed to a map of Belgium on the table and asked him to show us where he had come from.

"Where from?"

"Yes, your village," said Gibbons, and I thought I detected a look of sudden fear in the priest's large bulbous eyes.

However, his greasy fat finger pointed to a spot on the map, just east of Antwerp . . . and in a flash Gibbon's long white nervous hand clapped down on the map.

"What is the name of the village?" he asked quietly.

"I—— Look and see for yourself," said the priest, growing very red and then very white. "I . . . I don't remember."

"Search him, Corporal," said Gibbons.

Sergeant Major Billings had come in, and he helped me empty the priest's pockets: a dirty handkerchief, a wad of tobacco, a pocketknife, and an old empty wallet.

"Put him in the cellar with the lunies," said Gibbons. "I'll run him up to Headquarters in the morning."

The café where we had our command post consisted of one small and one large room with tables and chairs and a zinc bar, behind which was the only door leading to the cellar, where we kept the inevitable lunatics collected every day.

Only three of us were on duty that night, and as our prisoners were not dangerous, though occasionally noisy, we decided to take turns at sitting up to guard them.

I felt that I could not have slept more than a very few minutes on the floor of the next room when Billings shook me and handed me his torch.

"You're on till four, Corporal. But just give a shout if anything happens."

"Right," I said, gaping and adjusting my belt.

An old-fashioned oil lamp was burning on the zinc counter, but the wooden shutters were up outside, and there was no danger of our light being seen.

The lunatics were quiet, and in order not to fall asleep I started walking up and down the empty café.

Then one of our prisoners started singing, and one by one the others joined in. Opening the door, I shone my torch down the narrow vaulted stairway. Kneeling at the bottom of the steps, the priest was singing the loudest.

"Be quiet now and get some sleep. You all need it," I shouted.

The singing subsided a little but soon started up again. The priest's voice could be heard above the others, and I suddenly realized that he was coming up the steps.

The cellar door had no lock. Opening it, I again shone my torch full on him.

"Now be reasonable and go back," I told him as he mounted step by step, singing some hymn.

His large bulbous eyes, the silly smile on his face made me wonder if he was not just one of the poor madmen.

"Stop! I'll be obliged to shoot if you come up here!" I shouted, tugging at my pistol.

In spite of my repeated warning, he just kept coming up, step by step. Even had he not been mad, I could not have shot him. The only live thing I had ever shot in my life was a caged lion—and that was still a very unpleasant memory.

He was more than halfway up when I fired, well above him, in order to frighten him and to awaken the sergeant major. But the priest was really insane, because he just kept on coming slowly up.

He was now singing something about glory and God, and, throwing away my pistol, I waited till he was close to me and pushed him hard back down the stairs. He reeled back, and for a second I thought he was going to tumble all the way down; but, recovering his balance, he bent forward and mounted the last steps.

Without hesitating further I hit him full in the face.

"Sergeant Major! Billings!" I shouted as we rolled to the floor in a violent tussle.

Again and again I hit the little man, in the chest, in his fat ribs, in the face.

"*Doux Jésus! Gloire à Dieu!*" kept repeating the priest under the blows I was raining on him, but inch by inch he was moving toward the door. Whenever he could manage it he would grab my arms or protect his head from my blows, but he never once hit back.

Not having sufficient breath left to shout for Billings, for a while I just lay over the little man struggling awkwardly under me. He had squirmed over onto his belly, but I was sitting squarely on his back, and he could no longer move.

"If you'll promise to go back quietly I'll let you go," I said.

"*Doux Jésus,*" he mumbled.

And it was then I saw his hand slowly moving toward my revolver almost within his reach.

Sick with fear, I managed to kick the gun away from his hand, and the fight was on again, for he had managed to get up on his knees.

He was almost up again but slipped, and with a sort of animal rage I hit him with all my might. My closed fist came right up into his face and actually lifted him up. Some bone cracked and he staggered up, his face streaming with blood. The cellar door was just behind him, and, charging him madly like a bull, I at last threw him right down the stairs, at the bottom of which he lay moaning.

Panting and trembling like a leaf, I pushed a table in front of the cellar door and jammed it against the heavy counter.

"What's the matter? Don't shake me like that!" said Billings.

"Come, come quick!" I told him, and dashed back to see if the table in front of the door had moved.

"My! You're in a pretty mess," said the sergeant major, blinking in the light. "Been fighting the whole German Army on your own, or something?"

Still shaking, I explained what had happened.

"Why didn't you call me?"

"But I did!" And I explained how even my warning shot had not awakened anyone.

"Well, that'll learn you! Don't fire any warning shots another time. Aim lower," was Billings' only comment as he examined a shoe the priest had lost during the fight.

He slowly pulled out and unfolded a piece of dirty white paper. It was the tracing of a map with, on it, little blue-ink crosses.

Still bruised and aching all over and hardly able to close my right hand on the throttle of my bike, I rode up to the battery in the wood. It was almost dawn, and the major was already up.

"The blighter," he said, poring over the tracing which he was comparing with his map. "See those four little crosses? They coincide nicely with the emplacement of my guns. I'm pulling out of here!"

Sometime later that morning I was told to report to Captain McCarthy at the infirmary.

"I've seen a few, very few intelligent bruisers in my time, but you're the first 'intelligence-bruiser' I've ever come across. Congratulations; you busted his nose good and proper."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Don't be too sorry. He might have coshed you instead. He wants to see you. Come this way."

His nose seemed about twice the size, and one of his eyes was completely closed. Speaking with difficulty through a cracked lip and wadding stuffed up both his nostrils, he assured me that he was innocent. He also told me he had no ill feelings over our little affair, and he insisted on giving me his blessing when I left.

He was shot by the military police that afternoon.

5

Retreating is probably the most disagreeable thing in warfare and certainly the most difficult to organize.

Most of us were beginning to feel that this was not a mere tactical withdrawal after a more or less useless rush forward into Belgium. There were little telling signs. We were no longer receiving any mail; orders to move were coming more and more often and sometimes at very short notice. On one or two occasions we would have been left behind, had not Lieutenant Gibbons himself kept a careful watch on Headquarters. Finally, though we were never pressed very hard by the enemy, the French on our right and the Belgians on our left were, and we could sense that pressure.

For a journalist turned soldier to have no news of any sort, no papers to read, and no means of forming an opinion of the situation other than from wild rumors and happenings in the immediate neighborhood was a very strange experience indeed.

The main rumor was that the Germans had broken through the Maginot Line and, before making any attempt at pushing toward Paris, were advancing right across France in order to cut us off. This at least sounded a reasonable enough rumor and seemed to explain our move back toward the French frontier. It was only later, when things became hectic, that it occurred to me that we were trying to evacuate the Continent.

We were close enough to the front to hear the gunfire and even the machine guns, and occasionally we also had our share of shelling.

Being dive-bombed was a sickening experience; it always gave me

the feeling that the plane was diving straight at me and that its bomb must surely hit me right in the pit of the stomach or, if I was lying face down, just between my shoulder blades. Crossroads, bridges, and village streets seemed to be the favorite targets for dive bombers. Another thing which we could not at the time understand and which worried us a good deal was the scarcity of our planes in the air. During the whole of the retreat I only saw British planes twice.

The first German prisoner I saw was a young airman whose plane we had been lucky enough to shoot down with Bren guns. He had been strafing the road, and for a long time—at least it seemed quite a long time—I had been watching the tracer bullets disappearing into his machine. At last it toppled, turned crazily, and bellylanded in a nearby field. We cheered and ran like mad toward the plane, wondering why the pilot who had jumped out unhurt was running to meet us as fast as he could. We understood a few seconds later when his plane exploded with a bang that stopped us dead in our tracks.

Although I had not had more than a few months of army life, what surprised me most was his long fair hair and his smile. He spoke a little English and told us delightedly that he would soon be released, and it was from him we got the first real news of the disaster. Yes, Lille was already occupied, and though we of course pretended not to believe him it explained our sudden northwest move after having crossed back into France.

We were now beginning to hear of the Germans being ahead as well as behind us. We kept running into French soldiers, little groups of them who had lost sight of their officers and who did not know what to do or where to go. Many of them simply came along with us.

There seemed to be fewer refugees but many more soldiers on the roads. Food was no longer reaching us regularly, and we had to live on iron rations or what we could find in the abandoned farms and villages.

One afternoon, as we topped the shoulder of a hill at the head of a long convoy, a military policeman came running up, signaling us to stop. In no time word ran down the column that the enemy was somewhere ahead of us, moving in with tanks.

"All right, then! Don't just stand there. Deploy!" shouted an officer.

Right and left of the road the men scattered into the fields, and I found myself carrying a load of ammunition for a Bren gunner while all round me soldiers were loading their rifles and fixing bayonets.

At a crossroad a little below us a French seventy-five gun stood pointing up the road which we had hoped to follow. The gunners were waiting in a nearby ditch, and one of them up a tree was watching the countryside through binoculars.

"*Les voilà!*" shouted one of the French soldiers scrambling out of the ditch and wrenching at the gun to turn it into another direction. Its turret turned our way, a large tank was slowly approaching. The seventy-five gun went off with a short, sharp, very loud bang, and in a matter of seconds, it seemed, the gunners had fired again and again. Belching smoke and flames, the German tank had lurched into the ditch where for twenty minutes we saw it burn as its ammunition exploded.

A dispatch rider finally came up to say that there were no other tanks or troops in sight, and the convoy resumed its march, leaving the French gun and its crew waiting for the next tank to show up.

That night we slept in the fields by the side of the road, two or three miles west of Poperinge. For the first time that night we saw the fires, fires burning all over the place; some were great dumps of matériel that were being destroyed, others were farms, houses, and whole villages which had been set alight by artillery fire or dive bombers.

In the gray light of dawn Sergeant Major Billings was tearing and cutting up all the clothes he had dragged out of his bag. I could not help wondering if he had not gone raving mad when he started slashing at Lieutenant Gibbons' beautiful riding boots.

"Get up since you're awake, Corporal, and come and help."

"What's the idea?"

"Got to destroy all we can't take with us."

"What do you mean?"

"Orders, man! We've got to move light. We've a long walk ahead of us, and likely as not it will be no sleep or food until we get to the beachhead."

"What are you talking about? What about our bikes? What beach?"

"A beachhead ain't necessarily a beach. Ships are being sent out to pick us up."

"Bad as all that, eh?"

Yes, it was as bad as all that. Lieutenant Gibbons had gone ahead to fix up our embarkation. There was no doubt about it now: we were being encircled and pushed off the Continent. Still, it was an organized retreat and not a rout.

I could not help wondering—and I still wonder—why we had to destroy our bikes and start walking when we were still some thirty or forty miles from the sea; there was not very much traffic on the roads now, and it was all going one way.

A German plane hummed lazily over as I was stuffing a small haversack with biscuits and chocolate, the most useful luggage I could think of for what was evidently going to be a long walk, and perhaps a fast walk at that. Leaflets came gently floating down, and we read that we were completely encircled, that the war was practically over, and that we might as well surrender without any further useless bloodshed.

It was quite interesting to watch the psychological effect of those tracts on the men who read them. Had they informed us that we were trying to get away and that we were going to have a very hard time of it, they might conceivably have discouraged a good many. But the categorical statement that the war was practically over seemed so untrue, so impossible, that it looked as though the Germans must be in trouble elsewhere and were attempting to reduce the strain on our side! In our little group, at least, the tracts were a failure, and somehow they boosted our morale.

All that day we marched westward, and I thanked my lucky stars for comfortable army boots. We saw very few troops not marching at ease, and as time wore on the general impression was rather that of a huge football crowd on its way home. Occasionally German planes would come over strafing the road, but we always had plenty of time to scatter in ditches and fields. Ambulances came by at regular intervals to pick up any casualties, but there were very few.

Refugees and civilians seemed to have disappeared entirely. Here and there we would come across more groups of French soldiers. Most of them had been through a good deal of dive-bombing and strafing, and some had seen the enemy at close quarters; many of them were complaining that they had been abandoned by their officers as soon as—and even before—things had started getting really hot. Many of the French soldiers were marching without arms. We saw no Belgian troops; we had heard that they had thrown in the sponge, and I sup-

pose that those in our area had promptly changed into civilian clothes and simply walked home.

It was a lovely sunny day, though not too hot for marching, but a blue haze of smoke seemed to cling to the trees and fields. Right and left of us and getting closer and closer as we went, black and white columns of smoke from countless fires were rising into the still blue sky. High in the air, straight ahead of us, was an enormous black mushroom which reminded me of a picture I had gazed at in wonder for hours on end when a little boy, a picture of the Genie coming out of the lamp rubbed by Aladdin.

As dusk turned into night the columns of smoke began to glow, and as we marched on into the night the fires seemed brighter and brighter and much nearer than during the daytime. Sounds which do not attract any particular attention during the day seem to take on a sudden importance when it is dark. Talking less and less, the men were getting very tired, and all seemed to be listening to the strange sound of their shuffling rather than marching feet. The night was very dark and on each side of the road the trees stood out, gigantic Chinese ink shadows against the background of fires. On the road men, thousands of men, shuffling and dragging their feet. Now and then, reeling with fatigue, one would stumble off the road and drop into the blackness of a field.

There must have been other roads full of silent marching figures, but I had the feeling that ours was the only road and that I was the only live being on that road. I could feel my parched tongue, and my eyes burned, and I could smell the smoke floating over the countryside, and the sweat ran down my back in spite of the cool night; but all the rest was unreal, I was marching with shadows, shadows of men long since dead, dead in the dead of night. Only my boots on the road seemed to make a real sound, the others were only shuffling.

One fire ahead of us was glowing redder and growing in size; for a long time now we had been marching toward it, and I realized that it was not really growing but that we were drawing closer to it.

Out of the starless sky a thin drizzle began to fall, and I was glad that I had kept my groundsheet—I had not yet reached the point where being wet or dry makes no difference. Under the rain the gray road gradually grew blacker than the night until the shiny asphalt

started reflecting the fire ahead. The marching shadows now had faces, tired and grim faces that I could see bobbing up and down all round me in the light of the fire. Once before, I had thus felt tired and very sleepy, watching faces flickering in this way. I had to sink down through the years, right down to the little boy I had once been to again find those faces. It must have been a party, probably a Christmas party, and round the candlelit piano that had that wonderful smell of varnish faces were swaying and singing as my mother played . . . and I found myself humming the very tune: "Dancing in the Shadows."

There were not now nearly so many of us on the road; many must have dropped off to snatch an hour or two's rest before moving on. In front of me a man was limping but walking nevertheless; another marching by his side was carrying their two rifles.

My watch had stopped, and I had no idea of the time, but it must have been near midnight. My legs were aching sorely, but my feet were still in good condition and gave me the feeling that I could go on marching for several more days if necessary. Throwing my head back and opening my mouth, I let the rain trickle in, a pleasant sensation, until I crashed into the limping man, who had suddenly stopped. As I recovered my balance I was quite surprised at feeling drunk; fatigue was getting into me.

"You mustn't stop, chum," whispered the man with the two rifles, and they both moved on, but I had already passed them.

It was a big fire or rather a bunch of fires, and the wet road was glowing like a Christmas card, and the trees also were glowing, their leaves a strange bright green, and somehow, though we were still shadows, our faces and moving legs were those of men again.

At the corner of a lane a little black arrow on a Michelin cement signpost pointed straight at the fire, and under it I read: "BERGUES→ O Km 6."

Sometime during the night we must have crossed back into France, and now I knew that we were on the road to Dunkirk and not very far, either, if my memory was correct.

A little farther along groups of men had stopped and were discussing. A civilian, the first I had seen for a long time, it seemed, was explaining that they must not go to Bergues.

"The Boches are there, and you would be caught!"

Was he sure? Yes, he had come out specially to warn us. Some of us had been caught already. Yes, practically the whole town was on fire.

The sound of horses' hoofs made me turn and gaze at a dozen French heavy cavalrymen looming out of the darkness.

"*Que se passe-t-il?* Does any one of you speak French?" asked the leader.

"Yes, I do," I answered, going up to the tall figure on horseback.

I explained what we had just been told about Bergues being already occupied.

"A little farther on you will find a road to your right. You can thus bypass the town, but you will have to cross the canal, and I don't know if the bridge is still there."

"*Merci.* Are you going that way?"

"Boche or no Boche, I am going through Bergues," he answered, patting his horse's neck, and he was smiling.

Turning in his saddle, he looked at the silent mounted figures behind him, all draped in long gray cloaks.

"*Allons, les enfants . . . Sabre au clair!*" he ordered.

There was a sudden clatter of arms as the horsemen came to life, and their tired mounts pricked up their ears and shook their manes at the sound of sabers being drawn.

"*Bonne chance, les Anglais,*" and, touching his spurs to his horse, the leader trotted off ahead of his little group.

Dancing up and down, they went down the glistening road toward an old medieval gateway. They trotted through it and disappeared round the bend of a brightly lit empty street.

It was all very theatrical and unreal, and I wondered if that was not going to be the unique cavalry charge of the war, possibly the very last in history. As we turned right, on the road the French officer had told us about, in a sort of half-sleep half-daze I remembered the cavalry charge I had once watched and which I had then thought to be the last in history.

That also had been theatrical and unreal: a full squadron of Republican Guards in their gala uniforms charging a howling mob of rioters across the brilliantly illuminated Place de la Concorde in Paris.

It was the night of February 6, 1934, when in spite of all the efforts of the police the rioters had gradually filled the immense square facing the bridge leading to the Chamber of Deputies. But the rioters had foreseen even the possibility of a cavalry charge, and as the Republican Guards fanned out round the Obelisk, opening a deep wedge in the running howling crowd, people began throwing handfuls of marbles under the horses' hoofs. First one, then two, then a whole line of horsemen crashed to the ground in all their splendid uniforms, and before they could rise, like thousands of ants the crowd swept back and submerged them.

Later that night one of the Republican Guards had managed to reach, or had been taken to, the Restaurant Weber in the Rue Royale, which had been transformed into a first-aid post. Voluntary nurses were tearing up napkins and tablecloths to bandage the wounded. Word got around that one of the hated Republican Guards was being bandaged there, and hundreds of angry rioters gathered outside, threatening to smash everything if he was not turned out immediately.

His head bandaged, his arm in a sling, his uniform torn and bloody, he had stood up and, gripping his saber in his left hand, he had walked slowly and unsteadily to the door. There he had stood for a while, and the howling mob had become silent. Drawn up to his full height, breathing heavily, he had looked all around and then slowly walked forward, and as he advanced the rioters had opened a lane for him to pass. Without even looking back he had climbed into one of the waiting ambulances.

"There are still some brave men," had said one of the rioters standing by me.

And I wondered if any of the cavalrymen we had seen that night had also ridden across the Place de la Concorde in 1934.

We reached the canal quite suddenly, sooner than I expected. It was not very wide, but the only bridge, a drawbridge, was up on the other side.

It had stopped raining, and we waited while two men swam across. A few minutes later they shouted that the chains had been cut and that the bridge was out of action. There was nothing for it, we would all have to swim.

We were a group of some fifty men and soon discovered that barely a dozen of us could swim.

"All right, men, don't worry. Everyone will get over," said a quiet calm voice. "Those who can swim, step forward!"

In no time the crossing had been organized. Two swimmers holding each end of a rifle towed the nonswimmers across.

The water was cold, much colder than I had expected, and three trips was just about all I could manage; luckily all our group was over by then.

On the first trip I had tied my boots round my neck and put them by a large stone on the opposite bank. A sickening fear gripped my stomach when I started looking for them and could not find them. There was the stone all right, but no boots. I found them at last, the other side of the stone. Struggling into them was no fun, and the first two hundred yards proved perfect agony.

Dawn was coming up behind us as we kept walking, our clothes gradually drying on us. It was a dim gray dawn, and as the burning fires all around seemed to recede and grow paler we could see above them the black columns of heavy smoke.

We were all beginning to feel that we could not go on much longer, and without even consulting or saying anything, when we reached a small abandoned village we crawled into a house to snatch a little rest. In a matter of seconds I was asleep on the tiles of a kitchen floor, curled up like a dog under a table so that others moving around would not walk all over me.

Gunfire and the chill of early morning woke us up an hour or so later, and, munching our last biscuits and chocolate, we again took to the road. Straight ahead of us, over Dunkirk on fire, hung an immense cloud of black smoke.

On other converging roads we saw more groups of tired men marching toward the coast.

Although we had been retreating for ten days now, I had not at any time had the feeling that it was a rout, but the sight of abandoned heavy anti-aircraft guns stretching their burst nozzles like withered leeks made my heart sink. This was indeed more than just a retreat. We were far from being rear-guard troops; they, we knew, were coming up behind us, probably fighting all the way. Now, with daylight and

the ack-ack guns spiked, the enemy dive bombers would have an easy time of it. I could not help thinking that they should surely have been manned to the very last—and my spirits sank more and more at the thought that perhaps this was the very last!

We could hear planes droning overhead, but because of the smoke-filled sky we could not say whether they were the Germans again or ours at last.

And then as we followed an old-fashioned moat leading to a fortified gateway, probably one of those erected by Vauban to defend Dunkirk centuries ago, I felt much better. I felt better because of the table in the middle of the road and the two officers sitting behind it; that at least was proof that all was not disorganized.

Men who had been shuffling along for hours tried to walk smartly as they came up in little groups and saluted more or less awkwardly. Those with arms were being sorted out, those without were being sent through the gateway, probably down to Dunkirk. I saw only one man discreetly let his rifle slide into the moat.

"How is it you have a revolver, Corporal?"

"Field Security, Nth Division, sir."

"I see. What happened to your motor bike?"

"We were ordered to destroy them near Poperingue, sir."

"Right. We may have use for you," and I was sent into a nearby field.

They did have use for me a little later, when a car came along another road and I heard an officer asking if anyone could speak French.

"I can, sir."

"Climb in then."

Driving along the road we had come by that morning and getting farther and farther away from Dunkirk was not very pleasant. As we passed long lines of tired men trudging the other way I wondered if I would have to walk it all over again or if . . .

We were soon running between sand dunes. Here there were no retreating troops, but men busily filling sandbags, laying telephone lines, digging in for the final stand that was to protect the evacuation of Dunkirk.

We pulled up close to an old wooden hut as a colonel in battle dress walked out.

"Did you find me a French liaison officer?"

"No, sir. But I picked up a man here who says he can speak French."

"Where do you come from, Corporal?" asked the colonel, looking up and down my dirty battle dress.

"Field Security, Nth Division, sir," I answered, trying to salute smartly.

"Do you speak French well?"

"Lived in France most of my life, sir."

"Right, come with me."

The colonel led the way for a couple of hundred yards between low sand dunes.

"Got my map case?"

"Here, sir," said a young lieutenant walking beside me.

"Look, Corporal . . . Can you read an ordnance map?"

"I think so, sir."

"Well, we are here," he explained, pointing to a spot close to a red pencil mark on the map. "See that line of trees in front of us? Here it is and just to the left, there, is a copse which you cannot see from here."

"Yes, sir. I understand."

"Now, about half a mile north of here, in the sand dunes, is a French seventy-five gun and its crew. Believe it or not, none of my people speak French, and the French officer doesn't know any English. He is completely cut off from his own outfit and is just sitting there, waiting. Will you ask him to help us?"

"Yes, sir."

"He seems to have loads of ammunition. Before you reach him you will come across a couple of our sixteen-pounders—— There they go! They are shelling that copse. Tell the French officer in charge that he can help us by also opening up on that copse. Tell him the place is crawling with Germans and that we can't afford to let them get any artillery in there."

Ten minutes later I passed by the two English guns. The men were evidently fit and fresh, and they had either just landed or been waiting

there a long time. Everything was spick and span down to the ammunition boxes neatly piled between heaps of sand, and the drill was so perfect that they might as well have been firing blank salutes by Tower Bridge.

The C.O. had beautifully polished boots, his stick under one arm, his gas mask across his chest, his helmet perfectly horizontal, just as though he had been on parade. He would look at his watch, raise his arm, and shout: "Fire!" And like a ballet with every movement timed to perfection the gunners would reload and kneel at just the right spots for the next round.

I made my way toward half a dozen bedrabbled French soldiers sitting close by, looking on. One of them, surprised at my French, led me over heaps of sandbags to his seventy-five gun. There was the officer in his shirt sleeves, leaning against the wheel of the gun, his kepi thrown up on the back of his head, looking through a pair of binoculars.

"*Mon Capitaine,*" I said, saluting, "I have come on behalf of the British colonel in charge of this sector."

Lowering his glasses, he looked at me over his shoulder. He first wanted to know why I was wearing a British battle dress—he had never before heard an Englishman speaking French like a real Parisian, and I had to explain that I had been to school in Paris as a child. He finally listened to my lengthy explanations.

"*C'est bien.* Tell your colonel that I am supposed to be merely an anti-tank gun. I was told to stay here and knock them out. But tell him I'll gladly become an ordinary gunner again. Did he say how many rounds he wanted fired into that wood?"

"No, *mon Capitaine.*"

"Well, I've piles of ammunition, so it doesn't much matter. *Allons, les enfants!* We are going to warm up!" he shouted, clapping his hands, and as the French gunners came running round he added: "Have you seen the English gunners and their drill? Completely mad, *mon vieux!*" And he slapped me on the back.

I had hardly turned when the French gun barked its wicked short dry bang, and a matter of seconds later I heard the shell exploding over in the wood.

"Warming up" were the right words, and as the English R.A. lieu-

tenant signed to me to come over to him, I could see the French gunners, already stripped to the waist, dancing round their gun and firing off shell after shell at what seemed to me a record speed.

I explained my mission to the English officer, who said:

"Oh, splendid. I say, what a bunch of lunatics; look at the way they're handling that gun!"

That night I was relieved by a French liaison interpreter who had been sent up from Dunkirk. I had had a couple of hours' sleep, and as a car was going back empty I was allowed to jump in.

Once more, dawn was rising gray and full of smoke, and as the car pulled up by the gateway where I had arrived the day before, I had the strange feeling that years had passed.

Tired men were still arriving, but the officers and the tables had disappeared, so I joined one of the groups going down toward the sea. Exactly as before, the great pall of smoke was still there, hanging in the morning light, and above we could hear the drone of airplanes.

The town had been severely bombed or shelled, probably both. Some of the houses were still burning, and we had to clamber over large piles of rubble where other houses had crashed into the street. There was not a civilian to be seen anywhere, only hundreds and hundreds of uniformed men climbing like ants over the ruins barring the streets at regular intervals.

Heap after heap of bricks, mortar, and bedding and, at last, at the end of a long street the blue sparkling sunny sea. As we stood gazing, a little like explorers reaching their objective, an English destroyer, quite close inland, passed across the end of the street, the most comforting sight I had seen in years.

Having been often to Dunkirk before the war, I realized we had bypassed the port and come out on the beach of Malo-les-Bains. Coming out from under the thick blanket of black smoke onto the sunlit beach was much like a dream, and the whole scene might well have been the setting of a surrealist painting. The great blocks of stone and cement strewn in the vivid light along the sea-front pavement and the long files of khaki men undulating all over the beach like thousands of ants might well have come out of a Salvador Dali picture. Even the jagged charred wrecks offshore and the French destroyer over on its side in shallow blue water had their place in the picture.

A shell came whining over, and like some fantastic ballet, the long lines of men scattered in all directions, digging frantically into the sand like ants gone mad. A great spout of water went up some hundred yards from the beach, and the long lines formed again.

At the southern end of the beach, to our left, was a wooden pier to which ships were tying up and taking on loads of scrambling men, and no sooner was a ship away than another would take its place. A landing party of marines had taken over on the beach, and naval officers were organizing the embarkation.

"Just keep in line, men. There will be plenty of boats and later today lots of small ones that you can wade out to. Everyone will get taken off," explained one naval officer, walking up and down the line I had joined.

Every now and then an ambulance would pull up at the end of the line leading to the pier. Without attempting to walk in the sand the stretcher-bearers would just lift up the stretcher over the heads of the waiting men, and thousands of hands would propel it forward, up onto the wooden pier and on board a boat. A minute or so later the empty stretcher would come back the same way.

In front of me a man held a bottle under his arm. The sun was getting very hot, and the sight of the bottle made me feel terribly thirsty. I had had nothing to drink since the day before.

"Give us a drink, mate," I begged.

"No b—— fear! That's cognac, and I'm taking it home!"

As he turned to look at me, I recognized the man I had seen dropping his rifle in the moat.

Again the whining of a shell, and we all hunched forward in the sand. There was a terrific bang and a lot of whistling—just like a firework display, I thought, not knowing what a shrapnel shell was. A second and a third came over, and this time men were hit and some howled. And there was nothing to be done but wait for it.

Again the whining and the bang, but this time I felt a hot angry swish by my ear, and in front of me the man with the bottle grunted. The piece of shrapnel had caught him full in the back of the head, just under the edge of his helmet, as he bent forward. I touched it, and part of his brain slid down his neck in a trickle of thick red blood.

Feeling very ill, I tugged at the bottle under his arm. Breaking the

neck off, I drank probably as much brandy as I had drunk in my whole life. The bottle was half empty when I passed it on to the man behind me.

I must have slept a good many hours, because the sun was getting low when I awoke. I was surprised to learn and see that the pier had been destroyed, that we had been strafed and bombed, and that we had now started embarking on all sorts of small boats coming to within wading distance.

"Any hope of anything to eat?"

No. Some iron rations had been handed out though, and some of the men had abandoned the lines to go into town: a few of them had apparently found food.

The idea of losing my chance of getting away was sickening, but my hunger and especially my renewed thirst made me get up.

Terribly stiff and lightheaded, I trudged slowly toward the remnants of the pier, but as soon as I left the soft sand I found I could walk fairly well and made my way into town.

Shops were either destroyed or closed, and the only people wandering around were soldiers. Wondering vaguely if we were not risking getting shot as looters, I at last reached a large open square partly in ruins.

A beheaded man kneeling by the iron shutter of a bank made me hurry on to a café which was open, wide open, with all its windows gone and most of its disemboweled chairs and tables all over the street. In one corner, however, a man and a woman, the first two civilians I had seen in Dunkirk, were sitting at a table. The woman must have been very tired, because she had fallen asleep, her head in her folded arms on the table. The man was sitting up, looking at her in a sort of daze.

"*Pardon, monsieur,*" I said, and when he did not budge I walked up and nearly stepped into the pool of blood, and saw his white dead face. I touched her, but even before touching her I knew that she too was dead. They must have been sitting there, just like that, when the place was hit.

There were bottles still intact on a shelf behind the counter, though a large mirror behind them was shattered. They were bottles of liqueur. I tried the tap at one end of the counter, but no water came out, and

then, stooping down, I saw the bottles of mineral water. After drinking nearly a whole bottle I found a large chunk of cheese on a dirty plate and gobbled it up like a hungry puppy dog.

Buttoning up two other bottles of mineral water in my battle dress, I crossed the square by a smashed statue and in a side street opposite, there stood a man holding a horse. In his hand I recognized the shape of the cloth-covered cavalry helmet.

"You are one of the men I saw just outside Bergues the other night?"

"Yes."

"You must come to the beach with me. That is where the troops are embarking."

"I have been, but they would not take me with my horse."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"Try to get through the enemy lines tonight."

It was quite dark when I got back to the beach. Embarkation operations had ceased for the night but would start again at dawn. There seemed to be still thousands of men on the beach.

Many of the men waited all night standing in the water, moving up and down the beach with each tide. This time I did not sleep, and although the night was quite warm I shivered with cold and hunger and misery. Behind us we could hear gunfire, and when looking back we could see the fires glowing again and the flashes of the guns.

The sun was well up, and a few boats had started moving in again to pick up men—mighty few, it seemed to me—when we heard the tramp of marching troops. It is strange how, when in a desperate situation (I had by now considered our situation as desperate) every new sound attracts and fixes the attention. A hush seemed to fall over the whole beach as the tramping feet could be heard approaching in one of the streets leading to the sea front.

"The Guards, by jove!" said someone near me, and sure enough, spick and span, marching in perfect order, a company of men swung round toward us.

The order: "Company . . . halt!" the sudden stamp-stamp of perfectly timed feet, and then the inspection—yes, the inspection—which followed, just like on the barrack square, held me spellbound. We might all get killed here, but it definitely was not, and never could be, a rout.

There were now quite a lot of ships, small and large, standing offshore, but though the sea was calm the swell on the beach rendered embarkation in small boats slow and difficult.

"Those who can swim, go out to the boats! . . . Those who can swim, go out to the boats!" the order was repeated down the lines of waiting men.

Without thinking—I was still a long way down the line from the water—I started undressing. Having stripped to the waist, I took off my boots, hung them round my neck, and walked down to the water's edge. Wading out, I found it cold, much colder than I had expected; an icy ripple touched my chest, and, closing my eyes, I lay flat and started swimming.

All fatigue seemed to have left me, and I found I could swim strongly and easily, so instead of making for one of the small boats round which men were hanging and being pulled in, I swam toward a large steamer. It was farther out than I had imagined, but I finally made it, and as I grasped a rope ladder a sailor slipped a sling over my shoulders. It was just as well that he had, because this time all my strength was spent and I was hauled up like a grateful kitten.

"Plenty of water to drink down below and tea coming up any moment now," said a steward.

I stared at him, at the letters S and R on the lapel of his vest, and then I recognized the decks. I was aboard one of the Channel steamers I had crossed on so often. The green linoleum floors, the wicker chairs, the brass and mahogany fittings, it all seemed too good to be true. I walked down to the deck below to find a bunk. They were all occupied, some of them by bandaged men. Someone handed me a pan of water and some biscuits.

I went to sleep on the linoleum floor, which seemed lovely and soft.

"Wake up! You're the last man on board!" said a cheerful voice as a large strong hand shook me.

A policeman, a real English bobby, was smiling down at me.

"Come on, where's your vest?"

"Haven't got one, sorry. Left it on the beach to swim out," I explained, struggling with my boots, which seemed to have shrunk two or three sizes.

"You can't go out like this."

And the policeman unbuttoned and took off his tunic, which he threw over my shoulders as we reached the deck.

"Where are we?"

"This is Ramsgate pier."

Men were hobbling along the pier, and ambulances were being driven away as I staggered off the gangway and along a line of policemen toward a train. Some way off, behind a wooden barrier, people were waving and cheering. The men were in white and gray summer flannels and blazers, and the girls were in light flimsy dresses. Of course this was England with its holiday crowd; war had not yet really come to these shores.

Through the night the train went from station to station while its passengers slept and snored. At every halt strange ghosts would come aboard, ghosts with cups of tea and buns and sandwiches; they were mostly lady ghosts who could not understand why men who had had no proper food for days and days—or so they had been told—could not stomach a bun, even when it was pushed into their open mouths.

The climax came next morning when our train drew up in a siding at dawn. A detachment of troops was waiting to help us off the train and lead us to their barracks. We were lined up by the empty train, and an officer told us that we only had a mile or so to walk but that those who could not would be taken by car.

"A good hot meal is waiting for you at the barracks, and after that, to bed with all of you!"

Most of us walked, and the idea of a hot meal helped us walk. We were led into a great decorated hall, and it was indeed wonderful to see long tables laid with plates and forks and knives and spoons and, yes, even salt and pepper!

Large dishes of meat and great smoking tureens of potatoes and vegetables were brought in, and our plates were filled as we all sat spellbound.

My fork sank softly into a large potato, and the gravy smelt and looked beautiful. And the potato stuck in my throat. I sipped a mug of tea and pushed away my plate feeling giddy.

I woke up once, wrapped in blankets and in a bed, a real bed, and with a sigh of satisfaction I went off to sleep again.

6

Shortly after Dunkirk, while we were being "reorganized," I had written a long, very long report on the various ways and means of getting information out of occupied France and the possibilities of conveying information and propaganda to the French.

There were a good many pages to that report which had been written a little everywhere in England. As far as I could make out, our reorganization consisted mostly of moving from place to place or being moved from place to place—I had a marked preference for the latter. That was the time when the R.A.F. was carrying on the war practically on its own. All we could do was lie on our backs in fields and watch the German airplanes come over and get shot down—and quite a few got shot down through the months of August and September of that year. We little knew that we were watching the Battle of Britain.

After a good dogfight, when the last parachute had disappeared behind trees toward which policemen were vigorously cycling, when the drone of planes had died down and the all clear had sounded in a blue sky where the summer breeze was gradually dispersing the white streaks where planes had fought, I would turn back onto my stomach and get on with my report.

In spite of much condensing, there was still quite a lot to it, some twenty pages of foolscap which I had copied out on a borrowed typewriter. At last it was finished as we were moved to Halifax, where I bought a good stout envelope for sixpence. I hesitated a couple of days before sending it. Should it be addressed to the Prime Minister,

the Minister for Foreign Affairs, or the Defense Minister? The Prime Minister was certainly too busy to read twenty pages of my prose, the Minister for Foreign Affairs was probably just as busy, and the Defense Minister even more so. The only people who were not really busy at that particular time were the soldiers. Well, here goes, I thought, addressing the envelope to no one in particular but just: "The War Office, Whitehall, London."

Time had passed, winter had come, and while factories were forging arms for us, we were forming new recruits and playing pantomimes. Lieutenant Gibbons had become Captain Gibbons, and from acting-unpaid-lance-corporal, I had been promoted to plain corporal (paid!).

Shortly after Christmas, Gibbons had dropped in, handed me a warrant for a return trip to London, and said:

"You're wanted at the War Office. Something to do with a report . . . You probably did not know that a report to your superiors should go through proper channels, the proper channels being me in the first place . . . All right, all right! I don't mind . . . Have a good trip and don't hang around London longer than you can help."

"Yes, sir . . . no, sir . . . thank you, sir!"

This was indeed a surprise. Being in the Army, I was getting to know more and more about the Army and was by now convinced that my report had at last found its way into a file, a file where it might possibly be discovered and glanced at by an historian some two or three hundred years hence. Before discarding it as useless for his research work concerning the second of the fifty-seven world wars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, he would probably grin and think: "Saucy fellow that to write 'You must' and 'You must not' the way he did. Ah, of course, he was a journalist . . . strange, excitable people journalists must have been, awful liars too! No wonder nothing came of his report!"

Nearly all public buildings of any importance sported sandbagged windows and frills of barbed wire on the surrounding pavements. As I walked down Whitehall next morning, saluting officers right and left every eighteen inches or so, I tried to imagine a sudden landing of the German Army, somewhere close to Westminster, and could not help smiling at the idea of whiskered old generals and colonels—and

of course admirals and rear admirals at the Admiralty—potting at them from behind sandbags.

Outside the War Office I passed by a policeman and simply walked in at the main door. In any other country in the world this most important of military buildings would have been guarded by soldiers; I was, however, surprised at the number of policemen all over the place and astonished at seeing them all armed with revolvers.

A man behind a desk had examined my order to report to the War Office, consulted a large heavy black book, and called a policeman who had escorted me to a waiting room in which he seemed to be on duty.

The place was indeed a busy one, and though there were quite a lot of officers in uniform, there were many civilians, and what with policemen all over the place it looked for all the world as though some large business concern was being raided by Scotland Yard.

Wondering if I would have to wait a long time, I sat down in a high-backed leather armchair, close to a smoldering little coal fire in a chimney that could easily have taken—and that probably had taken —sawed up tree trunks.

The door opened. "One-ho-eight!" said a voice, and my guardian angel signed to me to follow. I picked up my gas mask, buttoned up my greatcoat, and followed, up stairs, down stairs, round large lift cages, round corners and bends, by men sitting behind empty tables, along corridors, more steps, and at last to a door bearing the number 108. My guide knocked at the door, opened it, let me in, and closed it behind me.

I found myself in a long, narrow, high-ceilinged room at the end of which, some ten paces away, was a small black desk, a carpet hardly larger than the desk, and a chair on each side. Sitting behind the desk was a smiling officer, a colonel, who rose as I saluted and stood at attention before him.

"Sit down," he said with a smile. "This isn't a barracks. Cigarette?"

Where had I seen that man before? But it was only on my way back to Hull the following day that I remembered; the captain in the little office in a side street near the Embassy in Paris, the little office where I had joined up for the "duration and the King's Pleasure." I eventually got to know Colonel Gielgud, brother of John Gielgud,

the Shakespearian actor. Gielgud was the man who formed the nucleus of an organization which, later, was to become quite famous under the orders of Major Buckmaster.

My report had been carefully read and studied, and several ideas in it had already been adopted, explained the smiling colonel.

"Of course you speak French fluently?" he asked in excellent French.

"*Oui, mon Colonel,*" I answered, and the conversation went on in French, about my newspaper experience, my family, the places and the people I knew in France.

Once or twice a secretary came in and joined in the conversation.

"Would you eventually be willing to go over to France?" said the colonel at last.

"Er . . . yes . . . that is, perhaps. But how, sir? And . . . to do what?"

"I don't know yet. Of course I must tell you that you are under no obligation of any sort, and a refusal would in no way hinder your possible advancement in the Army—— All right! Don't say it—I see that you were about to say nasty things about the Army . . . Right?"

"I am ready to go to France whenever you wish, sir. But how?"

"Oh, there are various ways. The simplest and quickest of course is being dropped."

"Parachuted?"

"Yes."

"That is quite impossible, sir. I am sorry, but I could never do that!"

"Surely, not afraid?" he said with a twinkle in his eye.

"I'd be terrified, and I know that I . . . well, I couldn't!"

"Yes, well, don't worry; we'll talk about all that later. Just remember that in this sort of work, you are never *obliged* to do any particular job. You always have a chance of saying no."

"Yes, sir. I see."

I had a feeling that this was it, my first and last interview concerning a job that might have been interesting, but a job for heroes only. It was no use pretending, and the very idea of jumping out into space made me feel sick.

"I understand you have been proposed for O.C.T.U. . . . Sandhurst," said the colonel, glancing at some papers on his desk. "No,

nothing of our doing here; but we are in no particular hurry, and Sandhurst will teach you a lot. Drop in and see me when you get through in about three months' time."

"But, sir . . . if I cannot——"

"Please don't worry about that for the moment. To tell you the truth, I rather like your fear of being parachuted—I prefer that to people who think they are afraid of nothing."

"But Sir . . . won't I have to ask for an appointment, or something?"

"No, just drop in one morning. I'll be here."

The War Office was really quite well guarded. As I stepped out of Colonel Gielgud's office I found my policeman still waiting in the passage to accompany me right back to the street.

Sandhurst was very much like going back to school. Over and above military rules and regulations it had somehow all the childish discipline of school, no doubt a good thing in peacetime for overgrown, more or less bright youngsters, but which proved a little harassing for many of us who were full-grown men.

My first misery on arrival was having my peak cap taken away from me and again having to wear an impossible forage cap but, this time, with a white band to show that I was an officer cadet. This white band (and two white shoulder tabs) immediately gave us certain social advantages. Though I was no longer a corporal, I was, however, no longer a "body" or a "man." I was "Sir" for the batmen, the orderlies, and the Guardsmen who taught us—or at least tried to teach us—how to march and how to handle arms properly; this did not prevent them from telling us off in no uncertain terms, but there was the pleasant "Sir!" at the beginning and at the end of each remonstrance.

My pet nightmare was a certain regimental sergeant major of the Guards, known throughout the British Army for his stentorian voice. The noise that man could make was indeed awe-inspiring. Through years of shouting his mouth had grown bigger and bigger, and I always had a feeling that, someday, if he breathed in hard enough when his mouth happened to be wide open he would surely swallow himself. In spite of his mouth which, at rest, was partly concealed by a bushy but beautifully trim mustache, he was the "smartest-spickest-and-spannest" soldier I had ever seen. His clothes were always perfect

and his boots always sparkling, like only a Guardsman's boots can sparkle for the first ten seconds after he has put them on, except that his boots went on sparkling indefinitely.

No one, to my knowledge, had ever seen that sergeant major undressed, and the nearest we ever saw him come to relax was when standing "At ease!" There were long discussions among the cadets as to how and where he slept. Some maintained that he slept at attention on an ironing board; others were convinced that he slept fully dressed, standing up in a cupboard.

One night when I was on sentry duty, without even a raid warning a bomb came whistling down on one of the wings of the school. Before I could rush in to ring the alarm bell the regimental sergeant major had done so, and I found him fully dressed, his stick under his arm, standing by the stairs where the cadets would come stumbling down. There was a patter of bare feet, and a group of terrified boys came rushing down.

"Stop! Go back and get dressed!" shouted the sergeant major.

The first stopped dead and were about to obey when the lights flickered suddenly in a cloud of red brick dust blowing down a corridor.

"Hell! The place is burning!" shouted someone on the landing, and, panic-stricken, the boys came rushing down.

Standing just as if he had been in the gymnasium about to give a boxing lesson, the sergeant major took one step to the right of the stairs, and as the first pajama-clad figure reached the last step a perfect right from the shoulder knocked him out. Two more men went down with hardly a sigh, and the panic was over.

"Now go back and dress!" bellowed the sergeant major, and, turning toward me: "You, sir! Go and reconnoiter the damage. I'll be sending you a first-aid party in two minutes from now!"

He caught me once for not saluting an officer the other side of a field. For over an hour he had me marching round and round two posts, saluting each in turn. Like many others, I had my revenge the following Saturday afternoon on the parade ground. On Saturday afternoons he had to teach the A.T.S. girls how to march, to drill them without shouting too hard, and especially without individual admonitions which so easily made a blushing girl burst into tears, and that we all knew was his particular hell.

As in every school we of course had our contingent of idiots. There was only one in my company, but he was first-class. I think he had already been through the course without getting his pips, and somehow I would not be surprised to learn that he is still going through the course.

Bertie was a kind, lovable idiot and so absolutely hopeless that no one would have ever dreamed of getting cross with him. Once or twice new instructors had told him to close his mouth when standing at attention in the ranks, and he had done so, but automatically his eyes closed also, and when his eyes closed he seemed to go stone-deaf. Bertie's open mouth, ever ready to widen into a good-natured grin, was not really unpleasant; he had a thick curly underlip which kept his tongue from falling out, unless of course he happened to be leaning too far forward.

Without ever being really out of step when marching, Bertie was never quite in step; his baboon walk simply did not fit in with a smart military left-right, left-right. The result was that whenever we marched with fixed bayonets—an almost daily occurrence—his could be seen a mile away, flashing wildly all over the place. His troubles were never quite the same as ours. For instance, Bertie would never lose his forage cap, but it would mysteriously slide round on the top of his head until it looked as if he were aping Napoleon. He also had an uncanny knack of catching objects with his face instead of his hands, even heavy objects such as ammunition clips and rifles.

Strangely enough, Bertie was quite a good shot with a rifle, but given a submachine gun he was dangerous. Submachine guns go on firing as long as a finger presses the trigger and as long as there are any bullets in them; they also have a tendency to pull a man round. Unless someone stood by, ready to grab Bertie, he would start firing a slow complete circle, and those behind or round him had the choice between jumping or diving at the right moment. He had only once been entrusted with a live grenade. Everything had gone well until he pulled the pin. Bertie knew that when he let go, the spoon would fly off and that about five seconds later the grenade would explode. Bertie also knew that he was not much good at throwing things. So he hung on like grim death. In the trench where he was standing, his arm would go up, and "Throw!" would shout the sweating ser-

geant. But no, Bertie could only go through the motion and bring his hand back still squeezing the grenade like a lemon. At last he made a desperate effort to concentrate; he closed his mouth, and therefore his eyes, and threw the grenade straight up into the air. The sergeant just managed to kick him aside, catch the fizzing grenade, and pitch it forward.

Route marches, night marches, classes, exercises, map reading, sand-table battles, physical training, games, church parades, lectures, trench digging, driving lessons, parades, weekly ceremonial dinners, and at last, after three months, the passing-out parade where Bertie dropped his rifle at the "Present arms!" and had not sense enough to pass out like a real Guardsman but just stood there, presenting nothing!

That night most of the graduates of my company dressed up in their brand-new officers' uniforms and, very self-conscious of the gold pips on their shoulders, went off to London to celebrate. They had hardly been an hour at the Café de Paris when a bomb came through the roof to explode in the very middle of the dance floor. Most of them were killed. I was to have been of the party but had changed my mind at the last minute and had spent the evening in a little Kensington flat with my brother and sister-in-law. We had sat by the fire, listening to the howling of the bombs, cringing occasionally as the house rocked gently when some of the hits were close.

The next morning I went round to the War Office and was promptly received by Colonel Gielgud.

"Congratulations. Have you been posted yet?"

"Yes, sir. To the East Yorks Regiment, at Beverley."

"I see, good . . . Well, you won't be there long."

Less than two weeks later I was again recalled to London and one fine night was put on a train for Scotland. At the station military-police office where I had been instructed to report I was received by an officer who handed me a railway warrant and who then accompanied me to a reserved carriage. It would be wiser to forget all about my name, at least for the time being, he suggested as we walked along the platform.

We were only six for the whole carriage, four officers and two civilians. They also had evidently been told to forget names, because we

soon got talking but no one offered any sort of introduction. As the train ran on into the night someone said something in French, and I discovered that all my companions spoke French without accent; at least two of them must be French, I thought as I listened, and then it occurred to me that they probably thought me French also.

After changing trains in Glasgow the next morning and traveling the best part of the day through magnificent scenery we finally arrived in a beautiful country house by the sea. From the front garden we could see the Island of Skye or, rather, the mist which normally enshrouds it. We were in a part of Scotland which had been taken over by the military and which was "out of bounds" to all civilian travelers.

The personnel of the strange house where we spent the next few weeks was composed mostly of colonial men with no families in England and, therefore, not needing any leave.

A very pleasant Scotch major showed us to our rooms and told us that our training would start next morning.

7

Like a strange smiling pagan statuette, a very small Japanese stood in the middle of the lawn as, shivering in our P.T. kit, we trotted out of the house.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said in precise clipped English that yet had an American twang, as we gathered in a small group facing him. "Would one or two of you kindly try to hold me?"

Not unlike a bunch of schoolboys feeling that this was a trick of some sort, we glanced at one another and grinned sheepishly at the diminutive figure facing us.

"Please," insisted our instructor smiling up at us, "this is the first lesson."

Blushing as only an English schoolboy can blush, a blond giant stepped out of our group, grabbed the instructor's wrists in his two enormous hands, and held him up at arm's length. In vain the Jap wriggled and tried to raise his feet toward his imprisoned wrists. Our blond giant merely shook him out like a rug. We then knew nothing about each other, but I later discovered that he was the son of a wealthy Seychelles islander, that his favorite sport was harpooning and catching sharks, and that he had come all the way from the Indian Ocean to volunteer. Though quaint and old-fashioned, his French was excellent and his accent that of Touraine. He had very simply accepted Colonel Gielgud's proposal of a "special mission" in France.

With an impish satisfaction we felt that our friend had turned the tables on our instructor, but we also felt uneasy and a little ashamed because he had evidently spoiled an effect.

"Please to put me down," said the little Jap after a few seconds. "You are very strong indeed, sir, and to my immense shame you caught me unprepared, and, as you held me, I could not have made you let go without brutality. Would you kindly hold me again?"

Throughout the whole incident the instructor's broad fixed smile had never wavered, but I had the uncomfortable feeling that the shining black eyes were not smiling at all. There was a certain tenseness in the air, and we all felt relieved when our amiable giant again stepped forward, knowing full well what was likely to happen. This time, as the large powerful hands came up, the instructor stepped aside, his small effeminate brown hands seemed to barely touch his pupil's wrist who then lurched forward, rose up in the air, and came down with a thud six feet away.

An hour later, though our backs ached a good deal, we were all able to perform this strange conjuring trick, and we soon discovered that the heavier and the bigger the aggressor, the farther and the harder he fell.

The rest of the morning was spent indoors with a young naval officer whose job was to teach us the Morse code. Having satisfied him that I already knew Morse, I was given permission to take a stroll.

As I walked through the garden sloping down toward the sea I heard the sound of a violin, someone playing rather well, I thought. Turning toward the music, I walked through some shrubbery and discovered a low wooden shed. Inside, his back turned toward the open door, his white head bent low over his instrument, a man was playing softly. Probably the owner of the house, I thought, seeing his patent-leather shoes, his striped trousers, his pearl-gray waistcoat, and the gold cuff links of his white shirt.

"Good morning," he said, glancing up over his shoulder.

"Good morning, sir. Please excuse me . . . I did not know . . ."

"That is quite all right, but don't call me 'Sir.' They poke enough fun at me as it is."

"I'm sorry, I thought——"

"Never trust appearances. I am only one of your instructors."

"Don't tell me we have to learn violin playing!"

"Oh no. That's only my hobby; I make violins."

"A very interesting hobby it must be. But may I ask what you teach us?"

"The art of imitating other people's handwriting, altering and faking documents, making beautiful official rubber stamps—in other words, a real trade," he added with a smile as he pinched the strings on his instrument.

"Is that really a trade?"

"Well, not in the legal sense but nevertheless a trade that can provide a handsome income if one is really gifted."

"And are any of your pupils gifted?"

"No. Most of them are quite hopeless, really, but I believe and hope that the little I am able to inculcate into their clumsy fingers may occasionally be of real use to them."

The "Forger," as we called him, proved a most amiable companion. Though too well dressed and a trifle obsequious, he was never tiring and knew countless stories about swindles and swindlers, famous and infamous. No one ever dared question him about his past, and to this day I do not know whether he was a real crook who had come to some fantastic agreement with the legal and military authorities or whether he was merely a very efficient expert doing a very unusual job.

As was to be expected, we proved very poor pupils. He at first showed a little more interest in me than the others, because I could write and draw with both hands, but it soon flagged when I proved an even worse adept than most.

The "Forger" did, however, teach us surprising things, such as reproducing signatures perfectly with the aid of an egg, how to make really fine duplicate rubber stamps, how to alter figures or change the date of a document. He taught us the art of extracting a letter from an envelope without opening it and, far more difficult, of putting it back again afterward. He showed us how certain envelopes could be made transparent momentarily or at least be seen through under certain lighting conditions. We learned how to remove wax seals and how to put them back intact and, therefore, how utterly useless they really are.

Always sharp on time, he would stride into the study room with his attaché case tucked under his arm. Opening it carefully in front

of him on the table, he would extract one by one some two dozen bottles of inks and liquids of various colors and a large assortment of pens, penholders, pencils and rubbers, hard and soft. Fountain pens stuck out of his waistcoat pockets like cartridge cases out of a Cossack's shirt.

In less than a week he was able to turn out a perfect imitation of any of our handwritings.

"Whenever possible try to see your victim write," he would explain. "Note carefully how he or she holds the pen, the position of each finger, the wrist, the arm on the table, and that of the body; also the slant of the paper. If at all possible use the same pen for your imitation and even though it may at first seem more difficult adopt the same position. Don't forget that simple signatures are the most difficult to imitate; fancy flourishes are generally quite easy—do those with your wrist, never the fingers. And do try to find the rhythm; it is all a question of rhythm. A really good imitation is never a laborious or slow one."

If we really wanted to please our teacher we had only to bring him some handwriting which we considered difficult to imitate. With a glow of pleasure he would look at it carefully, turn it round so as to see it upside down, hold it up to the light in order to better judge the thickness of the strokes, examine a word or a letter here and there with a magnifying glass. He would then carefully select his instrument, pen or fountain pen, his ink, and then slowly write a few letters or a word or two on a piece of paper, crumple it up and put it in his pocket ("An old and very good rule which should become second nature," he would explain), and on a fresh piece of paper he would start writing, slowly at first and then faster and faster, a perfect imitation of the handwriting in front of him.

Our friend had other strings to his bow. He knew how to make invisible ink. Like children enjoying a lark, we ran off in turns to produce our own personal invisible ink the day he told us that urine was one of the best. It shows up beautifully afterward when the paper is exposed to a sufficient degree of heat.

He was a good bridge player, and one night, after a couple of rubbers, he showed us another of his talents, cheating at cards.

"Surely, you couldn't do things like that if the other players were really watching you?"

"Of course this is not my real line, and I am only a dilettante, but I probably could get away with it."

"All right, let us try."

"But I never cheat at cards; I only know how to," explained the "Forger" with a smile.

"All right, but it won't be cheating really since we know you are going to try."

"Then of course we do not play for money."

He shuffled and dealt a first hand which was played in great silence with everyone watching him carefully. I was his partner, and we went down two. The next hand was shuffled and dealt by our opponents.

"My partner knows that I have cheated," he said with a twinkle in his eye as I sorted my cards.

"But how on earth did you do it?" I asked, laying down the thirteen spades of my hand. "You did not shuffle or deal those cards."

"And that is why you were not watching so carefully. You did not see me change the packs!"

8

Another of our instructors was a superb brute who had once belonged to the Shanghai police force and whom we had promptly nicknamed "Shanghai Buster."

Lithe in spite of his short thick neck and his broad muscular shoulders, he seemed smaller than he really was with his long arms and the slight stoop that gave him the aspect of a monkey having learned to walk like a man. His thick black curly hair, his broken nose, his flashing white teeth that no amount of punching had ever loosened, the long scar from ear to chin that seemed to pull up his mouth when he grinned would have got him a job any day in Hollywood.

Off duty his conversation was limited to two words: yes and no. I never once saw him pick up a newspaper or open a book. All his interest, all his knowledge, all his intelligence—and he was intelligent—concentrated on one subject and one subject only: fighting. His knowledge of anatomy was surprising, though apart from the main organs of the human body he had never attempted to find out the names of various bones or muscles, and throughout his short, jerky explanations he would merely refer to "this bone" or "that muscle" and point it out or touch it with his finger.

One morning as we trotted out on the lawn we had found him hanging upside down from the branch of a tree.

"Come over here," he said quietly, grinning as we gathered round him. "Can't say you look very tough seen this way."

Swinging gently with the ease of a trapeze artiste, he grabbed the branch in one hand, let his legs slide off, and hung over us.

"Can't say you look any tougher the right way up," he added, dropping to the ground with the lightness of a cat.

Looking us over once more, he at last introduced himself:

"Murder made easy, that's me!"

"Glad to know you, Mister Murder-made-easy," I answered, laughing.

"Well, YOU certainly don't look tough," he said, coming close to me.

Vaguely uneasy, I assured him that I did not pretend to.

"Well, try. Stiffen your belly . . . I said stiffen, not swell! Try to look like a muscle-cup-winning idiot . . . That's better . . . Stiff now!"

And I doubled up gasping with pain as he jabbed the tips of his fingers into my waistline.

"All right?" he asked with a grin.

"Yes, but—— Was that really necessary? I hope it pleased you!"

"Want to have a go?"

"No, but why don't you ask him?" I said, pointing to our young giant, who promptly declined the invitation.

"Yes, he's the only really strong one among you, though not yet half as tough as you'll all be by the time I get through with you," explained our new instructor.

He then made one of his few long speeches. Here it is verbatim:

"Boxing is a sport for nice people, no good for fighting. Catch, as practiced in the ring, is a swindle—has to be—otherwise there'd be a corpse or a good hospital case with each fight. But fighting, the fighting I'm going to show you, is not a sport. It's every time and always a fight to the death, see! Course you don't have to kill every time, but you can if you want to, that is, unless you're dead, see! It's fighting without rules, and because there aren't any rules, there aren't any fouls, and it's all fair play. So, fighting to kill is the only honest fighting there is, see!"

His first lesson was aimed at making us forget all we had ever learned about fighting.

"Always fight with your hands open. Never close them!" he said, showing us how, barring lucky hits, only a really good boxer, able to time his blows properly, at just the right distance and on very exact spots, can hope to knock out his opponent.

He then showed us how, with open hands and hitting with the base of the palm, excellent results can be obtained with far less precision. And by making us hit trees and even a brick wall he also showed us that one can hit much harder in this way than with a closed fist full of very fragile bones.

The "Shanghai Buster" taught us how to kill with our bare hands, silently and quickly and in a variety of ways which would leave even a criminal pathologist guessing. For instance, very few doctors examining a corpse would think of looking to see if the coccyx is broken, and that might be the only apparent sign of foul play. Without even bruising the chest, by a sudden application of the hand in a certain way, the heart can be stopped for a few seconds, or a few minutes . . . or forever if the victim has not a strong heart. He also showed us other ways of knocking a man out cold for certain and for far more than ten seconds. We very soon discovered that what that man did not know about hand-to-hand fighting and, come to think of it, about any sort of fighting was simply not worth knowing.

"If ever you do have to fight, more than likely it won't be in a nice open field or on the garden lawn, see! Think of that. Always use the surroundings to your advantage," explained the "Buster" one morning, after bringing us indoors and demonstrating how to pick up a tablecloth as you dive over a table, how to wrap it round your opponent's head as he crashed down under you, and, finally, how to push it into his mouth with the remains of the bottle meanwhile smashed over his skull.

In this strange and probably unique gymnasium we learned all the surprising and painful things that man can do to man with the ordinary furniture and fittings of a room.

"Study a room like a general studies the ground where his troops are going to fight . . . and always keep a way out in mind, see!"

We spent hours learning how to snap telephone wires—not as easy as it seems in films—lamp wires, and curtain strings, and how to use them to trip or truss up a man, how to use carpets to advantage, how to throw objects large and small accurately, how to throw a man out of a window (a little more complicated if it is closed), or push him over a parapet, a balcony, or staircase banisters. We learned how to

roll downstairs easily alone, or with an opponent so that he takes all the bumps, how to jam people in doors or behind heavy furniture, how, when pursued, to slam and reopen a door so that the person chasing you takes the edge of it full on—which form of counterattack necessitates a cool head, a good ear, and nice timing.

"Even when you're getting the worst of it always think up a way of turning the tables, see! Remember you've never lost a round as long as you're conscious, and you've never lost the fight as long as you're alive. That's what's nice about that sort of fighting, see!"

I can't say that we did, but little by little the "Shanghai Buster" gave us more and more self-confidence which gradually grew into a sense of physical power and superiority that few men ever acquire. By the time we finished our training I would have willingly enough tackled any man, whatever his strength, size, or ability. He taught us to face the possibility of a fight without the slightest tremor of apprehension, a state of mind which very few professional boxers ever enjoy and which so often means more than half the battle. Strange as this may seem, it is understandable when a man knows for certain that he can hurt, maul, injure, or even kill with the greatest of ease, and that during every split second of a fight he has not one but a dozen different openings, different possibilities to choose from. One fear has since then, however, haunted me: that of getting entangled in a sudden row and of seriously injuring, or even killing, another man before even realizing what is happening.

The "Shanghai Buster" also knew more about knives and pistols than all the American Indians, cowboys, and G men put together.

"A gun is a dangerous but not very efficient instrument," he explained one day, handing out murderous-looking black automatics. "It makes an awful lot of noise, and you'll be surprised at the awful lot of space there is round a target."

We were of course not surprised when he started showing us a number of ways in which a gun can be used without having to fire a shot, and, as usual, we soon discovered that the little we knew, had learned in the Army, or seen in films was mostly: "dangerous baby-stuff." He showed us, for instance, what a dangerous waste of time it is to turn a pistol round to use it like a tomahawk, how you not only

lose control of the trigger but how, if it does get pulled, the bullet is going to come in the wrong direction. Held properly, it can be used just as effectively for conking skulls, and the nozzle, always pointing the right way, makes an excellent jabbing instrument, whereas the top of the barrel becomes a most useful tool for short swings or rabbit-punching.

Explaining that to be of any real use a gun must be used both rapidly and efficiently ("You won't be likely to have to shoot at deaf-and-dumb paralytics looking the other way, see!"), our instructor tried to give us what he called "shooting sense." For hours on end he made us "grab-and-shoot." A real gunman never uses his thumb or forefinger to "grab" a gun; the forefinger must be free to curl gently but firmly round the trigger while the thumb snaps off the safety catch. The grabbing must be done only with the last three fingers and the palm of the hand. But that is only the first part of a complex operation; the second part consists of aiming the gun so that when at last the trigger is pulled the bullet will hit the target . . . and we were never given enough time to straighten up and aim.

"Grab-and-shoot! Grab-and-shoot! Bring your hand back into the pit of your stomach, and your belly will take care of the aiming for you," kept repeating the "Buster." "Shoot low, because the gun jerks up, and that leaves you all the upper part of the target in which to put your bullet, see! And since you'll most likely miss anyway, put in another shot for luck."

Once we got to know the feel of a gun and were able to snatch it up fairly well and quickly, we were only allowed a glance at it and then had to "grab-and-shoot" with our eyes fixed on the target. Thus, we learned to tell at a glance whether a gun is loaded or not and the position of the safety catch; we learned to spot the minute difference which shows whether an automatic has a cartridge in the chamber or not—grabbing and clicking an empty gun can be suicide in some cases.

"And don't try to look like Humphrey Bogart! It's only in films that men fight with half-closed eyes, see! Always open your eyes as wide as you can, like a tiger, see! . . . and you see much better."

Another day our instructor showed us how to disarm a man holding you up at close quarters.

"It's only in films that dangerous men are poked in the belly by a gun," he explained, showing us how to disarm such amateurs. "If you do have to stick up a man always keep out of his reach, and if you must get closer to him, then keep your gun away from his hands, whatever you do."

A man sticking a gun in the middle of your back is even easier to disarm. Unless he is very slow you cannot prevent him from firing, but the bullet will not even graze you, and you have a choice of three different ways of breaking his arm or helping him to shoot himself with his own gun.

We were also shown what to do and what not to do with a knife or dagger. Of course it is only in films and *Carmen* that people are melodramatically stabbed with a nice downward thrust.

"Nine times out of ten you'd only stick them and make them squeal like pigs, and if they knew anything about the game you would lose your knife . . . like this," said the "Buster," disarming one of his pupils with no more effort than is required to take a rattle out of a baby's hand.

But pistols, knives, and daggers are awkward, heavy, and dangerous tools to carry around, especially when one is ever likely to come under suspicion. So we were taught how to make weapons just as lethal out of objects likely to be found in the possession of the most respectable and peace-loving citizens, objects such as a box of matches or a bunch of keys. If you know how, a simple cork can be as efficient as any good rubber truncheon, and a newspaper folded in a certain way can be as murderous as a hammer.

I consider as highly dangerous any man knowing how to kill with such ease and do not, therefore, propose explaining any of these tricks or teaching others the simple and easy art of murder. Here are, however, one or two tricks of self-defense which, were they taught in schools, might save at least a few dumb clucks from a tragic end later on in life.

Let us suppose, dear lady reader, that you are one night accosted by some nasty, tough character interested in the contents of your handbag or by some even nastier character interested in something quite different. No, do not interrupt; I know that you are weak and not at

all brave and that in such a case you would only scream your head off—that is, if the scream got past your throat. But listen, you do not have to be brave, and you might as well know that screaming will not help much unless a policeman happens to be standing under a nearby lamppost.

Just do as I say with your umbrella. It is only a small one? Big or small, you will see what an excellent weapon it can be. Hold it tightly in both hands, one at each end, and rub its point briskly and horizontally across your aggressor's stomach—just as though you were trying to strike a giant safety match. This is quite painless but always brings about the same reaction: surprised, your aggressor pulls in his midriff sharply and leans slightly forward. He is then in the ideal position for the second and most important part of this simple operation. Still holding your umbrella firmly, you sweep the point up and jab it as hard as you can into his face. Now, indeed, it is all over bar the shouting, so scream as much as you like and call the police, but if you are the kindhearted person you seem to be you will also call an ambulance for your victim.

What did you say? What if the big brute had gripped your throat before you could even think of your umbrella? My dear Madam, that is easier still; just put your two hands flat on your aggressor's chest and push. No matter how strong or heavy he may be, he is *obliged* to let go. Unbelievable? You can prove it easily enough. Just ask your husband to grip you round the throat and to do his best to hold on—he may be delighted to oblige for once. Now push. You will even find that with one hand alone you can make him let go.

Of course if your husband is the cunning devil you sometimes suspect, he may push you up against a wall or even lay you flat on your back to strangle you. That is different, and pushing against his full weight will not help much, but you can still make him let go quite easily. I could of course show you how to break his nose in the bargain, but that would be cruel. Here is what you can do. Swing your arm in front of you as though you were a child playing at airplanes (old-fashioned airplanes with propellers) and your arm the propeller; as it passes between both of you, over his two rigid wrists, he will let go. Try it and see. (Of course if you are on your back on the ground

instead of up against a wall you play at helicopters instead of airplanes, but the basic movement of the arm is the same).

Now of course if your husband is really cunning he will try strangling you from behind! Pushing him away from you is out of the question, and arm swinging will not prevent him from choking you to death. But you can still make him let go.

Slip a hand round the back of your neck and get a good grip on one of his thumbs—he cannot prevent you doing this if he is still intent on strangling you. Now, just distract his attention for a fraction of a second by stamping your heel down hard on his toes, for instance, and without letting go his thumb jerk your arm straight up, catch his wrist with your other hand, and with all your might bring his arm down over your shoulder. Come to think of it, if it is your loving husband, you had better not, because his arm will break like glass; moreover, if you bend forward as you pull his arm down, whatever his weight, he will fly gracefully over your head and probably break his other arm as he lands in a heap in the fireplace.

The "Shanghai Buster" considered these simple forms of self-defense mere baby-play; in any case, he considered ordinary strangulation a slow, clumsy way of killing that always leaves telltale marks; he showed us instead a Chinese way of stifling a man to death which leaves no clue of any sort, a way of killing which cannot be parried, once the victim is in its grip.

"Climb in!" he shouted one morning, driving up in a truck.

"Where to?" asked someone as he drove fast but well along the narrow bumpy lanes.

"Railway station."

"And now, my friends, we learn the gentle art of breaking the wheels off locomotives before they even get a chance of blowing their whistle," said another.

"No," grinned the "Buster," "you are going to learn how to catch a train when it isn't supposed to be caught and how to leave it without having to bother about your ticket."

A special train composed of a wheezing locomotive and a single carriage was waiting at the tiny local station. We clambered in and, puffing and yapping madly like a young dog, swinging the carriage

round the bends like a saucepan tied to its tail, the little engine rattled us up into the hills. Snorting and panting, it finally pulled up at one end of a straight narrow valley, and we helped our instructor drag out a large gymnasium mat which he made us unroll on the ballast by the side of the carriage.

One by one he then made us lie on our backs along the footboard of the carriage and roll off onto the mat.

"Keep your legs and feet together and roll out as far as you can; remember there won't be a nice mat waiting for you if ever you have to do this from a speeding train, see!" he explained.

After each of us had rolled off the footboard a few dozen times he ordered us back onto the train, which moved off and soon gathered speed along the narrow valley. The "Buster" then showed us how to get out of the carriage and take up our positions on the footboard with our feet toward the engine. We were by then chugging past a long grass bank sloping gently downward.

"Now watch! This is what you have to do!" and, rolling off the footboard, he barely touched the ground, came up on his feet, doubled up, and somersaulted down the grass bank.

The train pulled up with a screech of brakes, and, running up, our instructor jumped on as it started backing.

Again it went forward, and this time we rolled off one after another, tumbling down the grass bank like so many kids. After a couple of hours of practice, during which we registered only two slight casualties—a twisted kneecap and a glowing bump on my forehead, with which I had scored a bull's-eye on the one and only stone concealed in that grass bank—we knew that we could drop off any train running at between thirty and forty miles an hour without too much risk.

Getting aboard a train going by at such a speed is quite another thing and not to be compared with the elegant hopping of a bus. In the first place, running by the side of a moving train is far too dangerous; one has to stand perfectly still, like a frightened but stubborn toreador facing the oncoming bull, gracefully swaying out of reach of its murderous horns but at the same time leaning gently inward so that the embroidered cape ripples over its head. Here the sway, which does not have to be graceful but which is nevertheless necessary, is

to avoid being grazed by the footboard. Leaning inward at the same time, just like the toreador but without a cape, one's open hands slowly come up and forward, closer and closer to the vertical brass bars of the carriage doors. They all come by exactly at the same height and the same distance from one's body. Leaning over still further, you let one or two of the bars flip your finger tips. You are then in the right position, and, provided there is still at least one carriage to come by, all you have to do is push your hands another three inches and grab! Your body is immediately lifted high off the ground and seems to become ten feet longer as every joint in it is brutally wrenched. In the second or two during which your body is flapping gaily like a flag in a stiff breeze, you have to drag your knees up into the pit of your stomach, and as, still holding on like grim death, you swing gently down, your feet grope for the footboard.

The "Shanghai Buster" thus taught us an amazing number of "tricks and gambols," as he called them. Though he could not do the Indian rope trick (perhaps he could but did not want to teach it to us) he could perform a number of surprising things, and, what was even more surprising, he made us perform them too—things like entering houses by the second-floor windows or walking up the face of a cliff with the aid of a rope.

The "Buster" also had two beautiful sheep dogs which seemed to love chasing us ferociously over the countryside but which, much to his sorrow, promptly became the most amiable, tail-wagging doggies if ever we turned on them. Their master had to beg and pray, entice, pat, and bully them before they would condescend even to pretend to leap at us; they had a marked dislike for "hand-to-fang" combat. We were, therefore, only able to learn the theory of this sort of fighting, in which a coolheaded man can put almost any dog—including police dogs—out of action in a matter of seconds. We thus learned how to break a dog's back as it leaps at you, how to dislocate its jaw if it is biting you, and even how to make a bulldog let go by making it vomit.

In a nearby field was an old horse which, outside of occasionally stepping on our feet, never showed any particular objection to having a rider pushed off its back. Our instructor also showed us how both horse and rider could be made to roll in the dust by wrestling with the

horse's foreleg in a very simple, efficient manner. Here again, however, in order to get any sort of practice, we had to use a good deal of cunning, because our guinea-pig horse knew the holds only too well and would passively roll over on its back before we could even start wrestling.

9

The "Shanghai Buster" and our Japanese instructor soon made each of us a terribly dangerous man. An army physical-training instructor looked after us generally and gradually increased the tempo of our training. A doctor living with us examined each of us regularly and looked after our diet. Almost daily we went swimming in the icy waters of the Atlantic or of some of the surrounding lochs, or climbing cliffs and sliding down interminable ropes, and generally ending up by running a mile or so in soft sand or two feet of water.

Other instructors, engineers and architects, gave us lectures on demolition, and we thus learned the easiest and most economical (from a high-explosive standpoint) ways of destroying all sorts of buildings such as factories, warehouses, barracks, and works of art such as bridges, dams, lock gates, reservoirs, transformers, port installations, railway lines, ships, and locomotives. By making us blow up rocks, mounds of earth, trees, disused railway lines, etc., our instructors gradually gave us the self-confidence without which it is extremely dangerous to handle matter that seems ever eager to blow things to smithereens and people into other worlds; but at the same time they also taught us the respect akin to veneration one must have when handling any sort of explosives. Once a man has thoroughly understood that this respect must not become fear and that, on the other hand, self-confidence must never become over-confidence, he is fit to become a good saboteur.

Thus, in less than three months we had acquired a store of highly practical but most immoral and even criminal knowledge which few

people (including criminals) ever acquire in a lifetime. And physically we were as fit as a world champion should be on the morning of his big fight. Though we had not perhaps the elegance of fine athletes none of us had an ounce of useless fat, and we were all capable of a long-sustained effort and going without rest for two or three days if necessary. Our powers of recuperation had become quite surprising: a few hours of a sound dreamless sleep on a hard bed—much better than a soft bed for sound sleeping—and we were again fresh as daisies.

One fine day—and, I must say, much to our regret—we were transferred to another school at the other end of England, this time a few miles from Southampton. We were lodged in a charming country house in the heart of a forest which had once been frequented by Robin Hood; our host was a charming major who spent many hours gently putting a golf ball from hole to hole which he had dug all round the house and in which most of us twisted our ankles every so often.

Though physically fit we still had much to learn, and we soon discovered that, for instance, to be able to send or receive a message over a portable wireless set is good but that it is better still if one is also able to repair the set, should it break down. To code or decode a message is fine, especially if one is able to find and put right a coding error. To be able to photograph a document with any sort of old-fashioned or modern, cheap or expensive camera is good, but to be able to make one's own "soup," to develop, print, enlarge, or reduce one's own films is better still.

To be able to open from the outside a shutter or a window and, from any side, a locked door, is useful knowledge. Thus, I learned that a locked door is almost as easy to open as an open door if the key has been left in the lock; and yet one of the best ways of making a locked door safe is to block the key in it in such a way that it cannot be turned or pushed out from the other side. Much to the despair of our instructor I was never able to pick even the simplest of padlocks. We spent hours taking locks to pieces and putting them together again. Those that came into my hands had one advantage afterward: no one, not even an expert, could have picked them; however, they also had a certain disadvantage: no key, not even the right one, could ever make them work again. Other, much brighter pupils soon became quite expert at this sort of thing, though of course they never approached

the extraordinary dexterity of our instructor, who, I am quite sure, could have opened the Bank of England on a foggy night with only a couple of hairpins. He was not very talkative, and I have often wondered whether he was merely the finest locksmith of the United Kingdom or whether he had a past history that had best remain secret.

We were also keenly interested by a number of lectures on railway sabotage and more often than not spellbound by the demonstrations that usually followed. These were carried out on a neighboring estate where, some years before, a miniature railway had been installed for a millionaire. The ten-foot-long engine—a real one—weighed over a ton and when properly stoked could drag a dozen carriages which grownups could straddle and ride on round the estate from miniature station to miniature station. There, playing like children, we learned quite a lot about railways plus other surprising things which experienced railwaymen do not know and are not likely to learn.

Practical demonstrations and exercises alternated with lessons and lectures given us by many strange people, very few of whom were ever introduced to us. Thus, a German speaking perfect English gave us two highly interesting lectures on the organization of the German Army. An officer who had for years worked with the international police organizations fighting the white-slave trade told us of the various ways of crossing a frontier without a passport. A customs officer showed us surprising ways of concealing documents and even arms.

We were now beginning to receive quite a lot of documentation on France. We had most of the French papers, sometimes no more than a day late. We were able to see samples of all French ration cards. We were given to read and study most of the circulars sent out by Vichy (seat of the Pétain government) to prefects and mayors throughout the country; we sometimes read these even before they were sent out officially.

One evening we were told that we had come to the end of that course, and next morning we were whisked away to a parachuting school near Manchester.

All that has of course been described often. As far as I am concerned, parachute jumping is a detestable thing, the very thought of which makes me feel sick and giddy. I know that I would never have jumped, had I been alone, and it was pride and the fear of looking

ridiculous in front of others that drove me to jump, not only the first time, but every time. Some people seem to consider parachute jumping a wonderful sport which they claim to enjoy; they are either abominable liars or, I suppose more likely, simply not made like the normal run of cowardly human beings to which I belong. It is true that when the weather is fine and one jumps from fairly high up (the lower the jump, the harder it seems), and once the parachute is open, then the descent proper can be strangely agreeable, though in my particular case any such pleasure was always marred by the apprehension of the moment when I would again reach land, never a pleasant sensation and often a very hard bump indeed. Also, the pleasure of coming down could never compensate for the horrid minutes that precede the jump and the atrocious fall in space, fall which lasts only a few seconds but which, for the subject (me, at least), is a very long nightmarish affair due to the fact that time more or less ceases to exist. For instance, when jumping with an automatic opening, that is, leaving attached to the plane a long ribbon which rips open and unfolds the parachute, I knew that, under the weight of my fall, fourteen different knots and strings had to snap before my parachute was completely open. Well, I was able to count quite easily these fourteen little snaps and shocks, although they happen in less than three seconds. Just try counting from one to fourteen clearly and intelligently in less than three seconds and see what I mean!

At least one practice jump was supposed to take place at night from a low-flying plane. Even in moonlight it is not always easy to see the ground and to judge one's distance from it. The best way of avoiding an unpleasant jolt is to watch the horizon instead of looking down and to pull hard on the parachute cords the moment the skyline becomes visible.

An R.A.F. instructor who checked our harness and gave us the jumping signal one day got caught by a beginner who had suddenly panicked and who was trying desperately to hang on although he had already started sliding down the dropping funnel. Caught unprepared, the instructor was also unable to find any sort of hold, and since he wore no parachute he hung onto his pupil like grim death until they landed safely, after which he punched his nose.

Another day a pupil who was about to make his first jump sat with

his legs dangling in the dropping funnel, and as the plane slowly banked for its run over the jumping field he quietly fainted and dropped out. His parachute opened normally, and when he came to a little later, he refused to believe that he had jumped; he was quite certain that, feeling unwell in the plane, he had leaned back and not forward. Nothing could ever induce that man to go near a plane after that.

The most courageous man I think I ever saw was a Pole who twice failed to pluck up enough courage to jump. He had begged the instructor to help him with a push in the back, but that was absolutely forbidden. Each time he cried with shame and rage in the plane which brought him back to the airfield. He asked to have yet another chance given him, a last one. He was this time accompanied by his brother, who had already jumped three times. His brother sat just behind him, and when his turn came he put both his feet in the small of his back and pushed him out. With the aid of his brother he was thus able to make his five regulation jumps, and the instructor never "noticed" that he had not jumped of his "own free will."

Accidents were extremely rare. The strangest and perhaps unique was that which happened to another Pole who, on his first jump, completely lost his head when he discovered that he was swinging violently and, instead of putting a stop to it as he had been taught, somehow managed to do the reverse of what he should have done and gradually accentuated the swinging of his body until he went right up, higher than his parachute into which he dropped like a stone.

"There was nothing to be done, except tie up the ends for the burial," explained the sergeant who had witnessed this accident.

We had now come to the end of our training with a number of practical exercises such as shaking off a man put on one's trail, meeting an unknown person in a crowd and recognizing her merely from a verbal description of her face, and trailing a police inspector without his noticing it—perhaps the most difficult of all these exercises.

The final wind-up was a set of important week-long individual exercises drawn out of a hat. We were given twenty-four hours in which to make whatever preparations we considered necessary and seven days in which to carry out the task we had drawn. This had to be accomplished in civilian clothes, without any identity papers other

than a sealed envelope which we were to hand over to the police or military authorities, should we get into any sort of trouble.

My lot proved easier than I had expected, because I was to operate in a port which I already knew extremely well. My orders were to get the names of all ships about to leave, if possible with sailing dates. The local authorities had merely been informed that such an "exercise" might be taking place during a given period of time, and, naturally enough, they hated that sort of thing. I was very lucky, was never challenged once, and was able to get back well in time with all the information I had been asked to get. I had also managed to get aboard one of the ships about to sail and to leave penciled signatures in various parts of the ship, the only way I could think of to prove that I had really been on board. It is of course easy to imagine why the local security organizations disliked these exercises which inevitably ended in a general grilling if successful.

10

"But, sir, I know far too many people in that particular sphere," I objected. "Sooner or later someone would recognize me. I would have to have a disguise for that sort of job, but of course that is only possible in novels."

Very tall in spite of a pronounced stoop, Colonel Gowen smiled.

"What would you say to another face? No, not make-up, wigs and false beards and all that, but just what I said: another face. Facial surgery has made tremendous progress, you know. Think it over. I'll call you in the morning."

We were sitting in a snug, discreet little West End flat, within a stone's throw of a street dear to Sherlock Holmes. Now and then the howling of a bomb would interrupt our conversation, and we would both pick up our glasses as the house shook more or less, according to the nearness of the hit.

Outside I found myself in the strange inferno of a heavy raid. It was barely half past nine, but for well over two hours already the blackout had been one long sequence of flashes and explosions with, once in a while, the long rigid fingers of the searchlights slowly feeling their way around in the vibrating thickness of the night from which death was howling down. The great nightly symphony was at its loudest. The short, sharp, angry barking of the guns in Hyde Park partially covered the more distant explosions of the heavy bombs. Above, the raiders could be heard waltzing ceremoniously round, and round, and round. In sudden relative moments of silence the whistling of the bombs would grow, and grow, and grow . . . and even before

the guns would open up again the crazy childish bells of the ambulances and fire engines could be heard tearing along the blacked-out streets.

A beautiful orange flash, and at the end of the street a big house opened gently and started sliding toward the roadway. Pushing a door, I found myself in the entrance hall of a cinema where I decided to wait, at least until everything that was to fall in the vicinity had finished falling.

Just back from the North of England where my training had ended, I was fully conscious of the new man I had become, of my new fitness and physical strength. Although I was thirty-five the exceptional training I had undergone had made me as strong and as healthy as I had ever been or ever shall be. I knew that I could fight far more intelligently and efficiently than the majority of men and that, singlehanded, I was capable of blowing up a bridge, of sinking a ship, of putting a railway engine out of action in a matter of seconds with a mere spanner, or of derailing an express train with my overcoat. I had been taught to drive a locomotive, how to kill an enraged dog with my bare hands, to jump from a fast-moving train, how to throw a horse, to decode a message, to make invisible ink, to receive and transmit Morse. I had finished my five regulation parachute jumps, and although I hated it each time a little more, I was proud of having done it. At the end of our training in Scotland I had had to walk for twenty-four hours with only a compass and a bearing. Twice during that harassing uphill and downhill beeline solitary march I had had to undress and swim across deep and icy lochs. That very morning I had had confirmation of my new "supermanness"; I had stepped in between a policeman old enough to have been recalled from retirement and a country lout who had promptly rushed me. His weight and my newly acquired knowledge sent him flying over the pavement, and the wall against which he crashed did the rest.

Thinking of all this, my head gently but surely swelling, I felt myself smiling in a superior sort of way at a portrait of Gary Cooper in the cinema hall where I stood waiting for the bombing to ease up a little. I could already imagine myself with a manly face like his. A little farther on was a portrait of Clark Gable, smiling with every one of his large teeth dangling in a row between his two outsize ears.

No, I rather fancied myself as a Gary Cooper . . . and I could not help laughing outright when, as I turned, I found myself face to face with a portrait much closer to my type of beauty, a glaring-eyed portrait of Groucho Marx!

The next day was bright and sunny, and I walked briskly down toward Trafalgar Square and the famous club where Colonel Gowen had invited me to meet him for lunch. He introduced me to a naval officer and to a Mr. Norton, a civilian who had very little to say but who sat staring at me throughout lunch. I was soon to learn that he was one of the most famous experts of facial surgery and that he was then daily performing miraculous operations on airmen whose faces had been cruelly burned.

After lunch the naval officer, who was also a surgeon, took us to his flat overlooking Park Lane. I was invited to sit in front of a mirror and there passed one of the most extraordinary hours of my life as, with the aid of the civilian, he plastered my face with putty, stuffed my gums and nostrils with cotton wool, pulled my nose up and down and in various other directions, lifted or lowered my cheeks, eyelids, eyebrows, and ears with stinking glue and fishskin, the peeling of which proved each time a tear-provoking operation. Now looking fierce and now grinning like a maniac according to the way my face was being pinched, pulled, pushed, or lifted, I watched myself looking like everything but a Gary Cooper. The closest I came to any known actor was a cut between Gracie Fields and Humphrey Bogart, a strange sort of "mug" that would have made Lon Chaney pale with envy.

"Look, this is what I propose," finally said the civilian doctor, pulling my ears up and back—not unlike a goblin's, I thought. "You see," he explained with a smile, "you are especially easy to recognize because of your ears, which are not set at the usual angle and which are perhaps a little large."

He was really trying to be extremely polite, for my ears had always been extra large and as I had grown up had always kept a good couple of sizes ahead. Moreover, they had a way of standing right out and inquisitively facing people, as though they wanted to see as well as hear them.

"For your ears, therefore," went on Mr. Norton, "I simply do this and change the shape of the pavilion, which I shall remodel with the

skin of your head just behind your ears. The lobe also stands out rather big; I shall reduce it in size and stick it to the top of the jaw, here. As to your chin, which is small and pointed, we can break it and with a bone graft make it smooth and round . . . something like this." And with his long nervous fingers he plastered more putty under my mouth. "With glasses, another way of combing your hair, and a mustache you will be a different man altogether."

Turning to Colonel Gowen, he explained:

"Two operations with an interval of three weeks to a month between and a month or six weeks of convalescence to give the scars time to heal sufficiently. In six months they will be quite white, and in less than a year they will be hardly visible."

"What do you think, George?" asked the colonel, smiling at me.

"That it can't be much worse than what I've seen today, sir."

"All right, then," he said to the surgeon.

A security specialist was immediately called in, and a long discussion on the best way of proceeding ensued. It was finally decided that I would not be operated on in a military hospital but in a private clinic which I would enter as a civilian. In order not to attract too much attention from the staff I would arrive with my head bandaged. After some further discussion all finally agreed on a large private clinic within a stone's throw of Madame Tussaud's—a good idea for last-minute inspirations, I thought, wondering if the surgeon ever strolled through the Chamber of Horrors before operating.

Soon after lunch the next day I called round at the naval surgeon's flat. He spent a good half hour winding an impressive bandage round my head. He started at the neck and wound round and round, this way and that, leaving two holes through which I could see vaguely and another through which I could poke a teaspoon or a toothbrush for eating and cleaning purposes. While he was telephoning the clinic to announce the arrival of a case which Mr. Norton was to operate on next morning, I managed to locate a mirror. By the little I could see I looked more like Wells's Invisible Man than anything else, but an Invisible Man whose head had considerably swollen.

"A few bloodstains on your suit might be a good idea?"

"Certainly not," I squeaked through my bandage. "This is my only civilian suit."

I did not ask where he proposed getting the necessary blood, but it was of course evident it would have had to be mine!

"Anyway, how am I going to eat this evening?" I asked, struggling into an overcoat.

"Oh, don't worry. Norton will be operating on you in the morning, and of course the less you eat before that, the better . . . But you'll be able to drink with a straw."

"Thanks," I muttered, beginning to feel very hot inside my cocoon and sorry that I had not drunk like a camel about to cross the Sahara before this first bandaging operation.

A nurse seemed to rush at me as I stepped out of the car at the clinic.

"Can you walk?" she asked, grabbing the door which had somehow slammed across my bandaged head.

Holding my elbow and pushing me around like a blind man, she conducted me to a luxurious room but where the enamel-painted walls and high metallic bed reminded me that I was now in for it.

A second nurse came in to help me undress. Oh yes, I had to go to bed immediately!

"Are you in pain?" she asked as I struggled with my tie.

"No . . . er . . . a little perhaps."

No sooner had I been put to bed than a third nurse came in with a smile and a thermometer. Although I assured her that I had no temperature I jolly well had to submit! Two minutes later she squinted at her instrument with evident disappointment.

Hardly had I been left alone—and just as I was trying to loosen my bandage to let in a little fresh air—than yet another nurse walked in pushing a smile and a trolley in front of her. In spite of her smile, there was a glint in her eye that meant business.

"But . . . I thought the operation was for tomorrow," I stammered.

"Yes, that's right, tomorrow morning. I am only going to change your bandage."

Two and then three of her colleagues—all with professional smiles—came rushing to her aid and to try to convince me that it would not be painful, that I would feel so much better after, that I would be able to sleep . . . but there was nothing doing. Standing on my bed, well

out of reach of their eager hands, I bellowed for my doctor. He finally appeared and chased them all out.

"Don't worry, the necessary orders have been given, and you'll not be bothered again. Oh, by the way, I filled in your admission card for you. I thought it as well to give you another name, so I put down Craven. Hope you don't mind . . . I just happened to be smoking one, you see."

"Yes, I see. Quoth the Craven: Nevermore!" I moaned inside my bandages, but he merely smiled.

Next morning, after a night which a sleepy nurse qualified as "fairly agitated"—have you ever tried sleeping with your head inside a pillow?—many footsteps and a number of voices in loud discussion were heard coming along the corridor leading to my room. As the door swung open Mr. Norton, already in white, came in, followed by two other gentlemen also in white propelling between them a stretcher on wheels and who, in view of their smiles, were evidently the first specimens I had ever seen of what is known as male nurses.

"Doctor, this is intolerable!" said a most imposing matron sweeping in. "All my operating-theater personnel has been turned out, and, what is more, they are not allowed to leave!"

"What's going on?" I whispered.

"Nothing really . . . The security officer seems to have changed his mind about things, and army nurses have been installed in the operating theater," explained the surgeon, shrugging his shoulders as I was being lifted onto the stretcher.

All my wonderful superiority complex left me in a rush when one of the aides raised my sleeve to stick a long needle into my arm.

"Start counting aloud, please."

My last vision was that of a sentry stamping past my door, bashing his feet down hard so that I could go on counting.

A white hot pain that stabbed right through the top of my leg dragged me up from unfathomable depths. The heat was terrific, and the white sand seemed to shimmer under the glaring sun. Some beast, soft and warm and heavy, was eating my leg, and I opened wide my eyes as with a snarl it bit deeper still. The lamp over my head lit up my bed, which I was now able to recognize. It must be dark outside, I thought,

wondering how long I had been asleep. And again the pain shot through my thigh.

My leg! There's been a ghastly mistake, and they've cut my leg off! Must have switched me with some other patient!

Paralyzed with fear and a strange sort of drunkenness, I could not at first locate my arms, let alone move them. And yet I must somehow reach that pain . . . and find out the worst! After an effort which lasted about a thousand years I finally managed to lift a hand which an unknown nurse simply pushed down again.

"You are much too talkative," she said. "You must sleep some more."

Unbuttoning the top of my pajama vest, she jabbed a needle into my shoulder.

Again I came slowly up to the surface. Guns were hard at it, and the windows were rattling as London shook under the thudding of the bombs. Her little bonnet all askew, her mouth open, my nurse was fast asleep in an armchair.

This time I was wide-awake. No, my leg was there all right, but there was a bandage round the top of it and round my waist! The lower part of my face was heavily bandaged but not painful. My ears were both flattened by the bandages going over the top of my head, but I could feel that they had not been touched.

"How do you feel?"

The nurse was dark, pretty in a way, and spoke softly and slowly with a funny little accent.

"You must sleep," she said, preparing another injection.

"You are not a Londoner, are you, Miss?"

"No," she smiled, bending over me and baring my shoulder.

"Where are you from?"

"I am German."

Her face seemed to have changed, although the smile had not, as she neatly jabbed my shoulder.

Of course that was the end of it all, the end of me. For her to own up calmly and coldly that she was German, here in a clinic in the heart of London, could only mean one thing: she was certain that I

would never be able to tell. Therefore, the deduction was easy: she must have injected poison into my shoulder.

I tried to sit up, to fight. Still smiling, and with no apparent effort, she merely pushed me back on my pillow, watching me struggle and stifle as I slid down and down into darkness again.

It was broad daylight. Smiling through a million freckles, a redheaded nurse was saying something about a nice cup of tea.

"They saved me then? What did they do with that German nurse?"

"What German nurse? You've been dreaming."

"Is there a sentry outside?"

"Of course not! Don't be silly."

"Is there no one outside?"

"Well, there is a . . . a gentleman."

"Call him in!"

"Now be quiet. The doctor will be round soon and——"

"If you don't call that man I'll go and get him myself," I said, trying to sit up without letting go of the bed that was beginning to go round quite fast.

The surgeon and the security officer arrived together.

"Hello, Doctor. What have you done to my leg?"

"I borrowed a piece of bone from your thigh, and you now have a fine round chin."

"I see, that explains the pain. Tell me, I'm not delirious, am I?"

"No . . . no, of course not. Why?" he said, after a glance at the chart at the foot of my bed.

"Well, hold on and listen to this. The night nurse that looked after me is German."

"A nightmare, old man."

"Nightmare, hell!" and I explained in detail what had happened and how I thought I had been put to death.

The doctor's smile broadened into a grin, but the security officer finally left the room, just to make sure, he said. He was back ten minutes later looking rather annoyed. Yes, it was quite true; she was German, all right, but a refugee in England since 1936. Of course I had nothing to fear, she was quite all right and really knew nothing about my operation. However, I think that because of our unlucky meeting

the poor girl was shortly after transferred to the infirmary of the Isle of Man.

A few weeks later I underwent my second operation.

I am now the owner of two elegant ears, and I know what a woman means when she talks about "suffering to be beautiful"! For eight nights after that second operation I was only able to slumber, flat on my stomach with a band to hold my forehead, and a nurse standing by, ready to grab me whenever my head rolled to one side. For many weeks after that I was never able to put my head down or turn it on a pillow without pain.

Two months after leaving the clinic—wearing glasses, my hair pasted down on one side instead of brushed back, and sporting a promising mustache—I made my first test: I walked into the office of a man I knew, and he did not recognize me.

On my arrival in France I went to Pau, where I stayed at the Hotel Continental, the owner of which was an old friend of mine. Several times each day I walked by him in the lobby or the restaurant, and he gave me the smiles and bows that he had for all his customers; we even exchanged a few words about the weather. I'll never forget his face, though, the day I walked into his office, carefully closed the door, and made myself known.

Only once was I recognized, and that taught me a lesson. In Lyons, in 1942, I telephoned to an old friend who, hearing my voice without having seen my new face, knew me instantly.

11

Shortly before my first trip abroad I spent a few days in a very strange house indeed. There was only one way of reaching "The Country," as it was called—by a fleet of cars driven by girls who did only that and who drove accredited people out in a little over an hour.

This country house, in truth a beautiful and immense mansion, had been offered to the government for the duration of hostilities by its owner, the head of a very famous family. It had become the headquarters of one of the most important branches of Intelligence. There, were centralized all items of news and information coming from abroad. Young and old, men and women, military and civilians worked there together and seemed to talk every language under the sun. Newspapermen, some of them well known, professors, experts of all sorts, and quite a few of those strange beings who, in peacetime, devote their lives to study, poring over books never read by the general public and who only know the silent social life of public libraries and museum rooms, were to be found rubbing shoulders, eating, chatting and laughing with typists, telephone operators, bank clerks, publicity designers, and servants. All had accepted this strange life of reclusion, away from friends and family who were not to know what sort of work they were engaged in or even where they were. Much like military personnel, they got leave at regular intervals, but whereas soldiers and sailors could at least talk about their officers and their pals, they had to remain silent and carefully avoid being questioned; their lives had to remain secret.

The chief of the section where I had been instructed to report to on

arrival, was at a dance, a weekly affair for all personnel not on duty.

"You'll find him quite easily. Just look out for a waltzing maniac," said a typist over her shoulder.

Some two hundred people were dancing to the sound of a pickup in an oblong room. Not knowing anyone, there was nothing I could do other than wait for a waltz and perhaps identify my man. The third record was "The Blue Danube." No sooner had the first bars drowned the general chatter than a fantastic little man grabbed a long thin girl and started a sort of high-jump waltz, but nevertheless moving round the room at an amazing speed. Halfway through the record his partner simply collapsed on a chair. Without losing a second he grasped the nearest girl and whisked her out onto the floor, round and round at the end of his long apelike arms, and the fantastic dance went on.

"It is the only relaxation and the only exercise I have time for," explained Professor Dent a little later as beads of sweat rolled down his long scraggy neck.

This agile and ugly little man was perhaps one of the most important back-room boys of the time. He was even occasionally seen trotting out of Downing Street, and he had a way of going off into frightful fits of anger whenever an official decision seemed contrary to any of his ideas and recommendations. A real Yorkshireman, proud of his accent which he never tried to attenuate in any way, he would have passed unnoticed but for his eyes. His face would break (and break describes it exactly) into a smile at the slightest provocation, uncovering big powerful front teeth, but his china-blue eyes behind his large round spectacles never seemed to laugh. A Jesuit—some said he had at one time been a monk—he spoke atrocious French but understood anything that was said in front of him. He had an extraordinary memory. During one of our very first talks together I mentioned the name of a French prefect with whom I hoped to come to certain arrangements. He promptly told me all about the prefect's entourage, giving me the names of people and even the name of the wife of another functionary with whom the prefect had had an affair some years before. He finally gave me his personal telephone number!

"You know him well, I see."

"No, I've never seen him, but I read a report about him two or three weeks ago. I'll have it dug up for you."

There was nothing in that long and detailed report which he had not already told me during our conversation.

The morning after my arrival I went out for a stroll in the grounds round the house and found myself face to face with an ostrich, certainly a most unexpected meeting for England on a cold drizzly morning. Knowing nothing about close combat with ostriches, I decided on a rapid retreat and quickly ducked into the first doorway I found.

"There's an ostrich the other side of that door," I explained to a surprised servant.

"Oh, it's probably Hilda. She's quite tame, really," said the girl, laughing. "The Canadian bisons sometimes get loose and come round this way. They are far more dangerous."

I later learned that in taking over the property the government had undertaken to look after the extraordinary collection of animals living in its grounds.

A little later that morning I found Professor Dent sitting alone by the pickup in the hall where I had first seen him waltzing madly round and round. He was listening to the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Though the famous V for Victory had been invented by a member of the Belgian Resistance, and I had already heard about it, I little dreamed that I had just witnessed the discovery of the Morse V in the opening bars of the famous symphony, which were soon to be heard all over Europe by all who tuned in to the B.B.C.

The tentative date for my departure was now fast approaching, and every morning I went round to a certain flat in Orchard Court, near Marble Arch, where one of the headquarters for operations in France had been installed. We had been instructed never to go near the place unless we were alone, and if we took a taxi we were never to drive up but to get out in the neighborhood and then walk. If the man who answered the door did not know you, you were not allowed in, and on leaving the building you were certain of being trailed by a police inspector.

It was there that the French tailor who was making my clothes came to fit me. The cloth for my suit had come from Roubaix in the North of France and was of a texture, a quality, and a color similar to that of

a large stock purchased shortly before the war by the *Belle Jardinière*, a very large, medium-priced outfitters in Paris. And so that it should not be tailor-made, the tailor had made an exact copy of one of the standard sizes and then made the necessary alterations, shortening the trouser legs, etc., which would have been done, had I really bought that suit at the *Belle Jardinière* in Paris. My shirts, ties, socks, and underwear, everything had come from France. Even my shoes were from one of the *Raoul* shops in Paris. And despite my moans I had had to exchange my Dunhill pipe for a *Ropp*, in which I was allowed to smoke only French *tabac gris*.

In the little room where identity papers were prepared a man was kept busy walking up and down on identity cards, ration cards, and French military papers, French army demobilization certificates, etc., one of the best ways of "aging" them rapidly.

"In which pocket do you usually carry your wallet?" he asked, tenderly wiping my papers with a piece of blotting paper which he had first rubbed on the floor.

"In my hip pocket."

He bent the corners of my identity card and my ration card and chewed them for a while to soften them a little. Another man was ironing various other documents, letters, and photos that are generally to be found in a man's wallet; this helped to make them yellow with age. A third man sat folding and unfolding continually the same document, the only way of really breaking the folds in a document that is supposed to have been in a man's wallet for many months or even years.

My identity card was dated 1939 and showed that I was born in a town in the North of France—a town where all municipal archives had, we knew, been destroyed by fire in 1940. My identity could, therefore, not be checked.

For several weeks now, I had been learning all about my new person and personality, the various members of my family, and of course my family history. I was single but had in the back pocket of my wallet a wisp of fair hair which belonged to a girl with whom I was supposed to have corresponded while in the Army, a girl of whom I also carried one or two very tender letters and a photograph. I also had a photo of myself in a French uniform and standing arm in arm with a postman, my

sister's husband who had been killed in a dive-bombing attack near Lille. The picture had been taken shortly before, and of course no one could tell that the bewhiskered French postman with his oblong box was in truth an Englishman who could not speak a word of French.

An expert spectacle-maker had made up for me a pair of spectacles with real French hinges, the glasses of which really corrected a slight defect of my sight.

My hair had not been cut for weeks, and a few days before the date fixed a French hairdresser had given me a special haircut. My mustache, which had grown nicely since my face alterations, was now quite bushy.

Some of my colleagues already had their cigarette-end tins. Tobacco was severely rationed in France, and the majority of cigarette smokers no longer threw away their stubs but put them carefully away in little tins to later make up new cigarettes from them. Not being a cigarette smoker, I had a cheap leather tobacco pouch with a zip fastener, the sort of pouch that could be purchased in almost any tobacconist's shop in France. Of course the cigarette smokers had to learn to roll their own.

During the long waits between the tailor, the hairdresser, and so forth we played interminable rounds of *belote*, crashing down our cards in the best French traditional way of café players. The modest but educated Frenchman that I was to become would of course be also a bridge player, though he would know nothing about contract bridge, which had not then spread to his social sphere. I therefore had to try to forget all about contract bridge and return to the old-fashioned form of bidding.

The day before my departure I was given a *Lip* wrist watch, an ordinary, modest-looking watch but which had nevertheless been carefully regulated by an expert watchmaker. I was told that it would keep good time for at least a year. As a matter of fact, it worked beautifully until the day I forgot to remove it before going for a swim some three years later. I also received a solid gold pencil, a most useful present, since, in case of necessity, it could fetch quite a lot of money.

12

The big day had come, and the weather seemed just right. I had been allowed to tell my father where I was bound for, and I had taught him a simple figure code that could be used with a well-known French dictionary . . . one never knew. This, I found out later, was a fault not easily pardoned. He left me very courageously after having slipped my wedding ring on his watch chain. Now that I, in turn, have a grown-up son, I am able to imagine the anguish he must have gone through during the weeks and months that followed, months during which his hair turned all white. One thing I shall never forget or forgive was the implacable and senseless cruelty of the service to which I belonged when, unable to bear it any longer, my father would timidly ask if his son was still alive, only to get the cold answer, "No news," whereas all the time they knew perfectly that I was in good health!

Ever doing all that was humanly possible to save a man in danger—and even sometimes accomplishing miracles—they were yet of an incredible, indifferent, and idiotic cruelty with wives and next of kin. Whenever they knew that one of their men was in a tight spot or out on some particularly risky job those in London would simply refuse to go home or even rest and would spend hours walking up and down, smoking countless cigarettes, waiting for the telephone call or the message that would either announce the worst or ease the fearful tension. On the other hand, a young wife who had just given birth to twins was simply told by some thickheaded idiot that her husband had that morning been shot by a German firing squad! An hour later another messenger arrived to announce that the first message was erroneous,

and finally, the next morning, a third messenger came to tell the poor girl that although he had not been shot her husband was dead! He did refrain from explaining that he was to have been shot but that he had died before as a result of the injuries he had suffered while being tortured.

There were six of us for that trip, and two army cars took us out to a lovely country house north of London, within a few miles of the big bomber airfield from which we were to leave that night. We each carried a small suitcase in which was packed a change of clothes and our toilet implements, every item of which had been carefully selected for us. In mine, for instance, a pair of old slippers was wrapped in a month-old copy of the French evening paper, *Paris-Soir*.

An agreeable surprise awaited us at the house full of stuffed birds where we arrived that evening, an excellent dinner served with good French wines. A really good meal is a rare enough occurrence in England, but a really good meal with really good wines in wartime was indeed an exception and a treat!

We had moved to the billiard room and were enjoying strong black coffee and big fat Havana cigars when an air force officer came to tell us that the weather forecast was good and that we would be taking off around ten that night in order to be at the rendezvous south of the Loire a little after midnight. In view of all that had yet to be done, we reluctantly gulped down our coffee and abandoned our cigars.

A last change and inspection before our departure reminded me of that foreign princess who was to become Queen of the French and who, on her arrival at the frontier, was completely undressed in a room on one side of the frontier, passed it naked in a second room built astride it, and dressed again—this time in French clothes only—in a third room on the French side of the frontier. The process was much the same. Our clothes were carefully examined by experts who turned all pockets inside out and went over them with a vacuum cleaner in order to rid them even of English tobacco dust, for instance. When I put my waistcoat on again I found in one of its pockets two Paris Metro tickets which, in case of need, were to corroborate my story that I had recently come from Paris.

After we had all passed this inspection we went through into another room for the distribution of arms and pills. I took an extra flat

automatic and a one-pound Sheffield dagger, the hand-forged, razor-sharp blade of which could eventually come in handy for cutting down a parachute caught in trees or even for cutting the harness if necessary. There were fatigue-resisting tablets, pills that produce a high fever and every symptom of typhoid and which have on occasion helped men get transferred to infirmaries from which escape may be easier than from a prison cell, and of course the famous arsenic pills. They were sealed in glass capsules and could thus be kept indefinitely and quite safely in the mouth and even swallowed without any danger but, in case of necessity, these had only to be crunched and broken by the teeth to kill in less than a minute, about forty-five seconds for a normal healthy man. Thinking that I might perhaps not find time for much rest during the next two or three days, I took a couple of fatigue-resisting tablets but turned down all the rest.

It was getting dark when we arrived at the airfield. We were driven straight to one end of it, where a single plane was waiting by an isolated hut. Inside we were given light, zip-fastening overalls and unpacked parachutes which were laid out on long tables and which each of us could, if he wished, check and pack himself with the help of an expert. The round-eyed crew of the bomber that was going to take us out stood around watching us, and I later discovered that this was going to be their maiden "dropping-trip." Fully dressed with our chutes on, we passed a last strap-checking inspection and filed out into the dusk.

"You had better verify your arms," said an officer who had accompanied us with Colonel Gowen.

My Sheffield knife was within easy reach of my hand and my automatic in a large pocket on my right leg.

"I suppose these pistols have been cleaned of their grease," said one of our group, and without waiting for an answer he raised the safety catch and with three rapid shots burst three bottles on a heap some twenty feet away.

"*Ave Caesar,*" said the scholar of our little group, as Colonel Gowen shook hands with each of us in turn.

13

A machine-gun burst coming from somewhere forward covered for a second or two the roar of the engines. A moment later an answering hail of shots burst from the rear. I made myself as small as I could under an enormous petrol tank.

"It's all right, we're over the Channel, and the machine gunners are just checking and warming up," explained my neighbor, who was on his second trip.

"Afraid our bus is not very comfortable," said a member of the crew, stepping gingerly over us, "but I've been told that you'll have central heating for your next trip. Have a drink," he added, drawing a flask out of his hip pocket. "I don't want to be accused of having dropped frozen meat instead of men."

"You don't happen to know a fellow called Deibler, do you?" asked a man after wiping his mouth and passing on the flask.

"No. A French pilot?"

"Yes, in a way. He pilots people into the other world and usually offers them a cigarette and a glass of rum before marching them to the guillotine."

I must have dozed and then fallen asleep. A sergeant was pushing us back toward the rear and picking up the blankets on which we had been lying.

"Are we there?" I asked an officer standing by.

"We've just crossed the Loire east of Tours. We're a little ahead of schedule actually, but if all goes well I'll be dropping you in about ten minutes from now. The field is very short, so we'll have to make

two runs, only dropping a stick of three each time. But even so, you will have to make it snappy on the lights. You can open the shop now, Sergeant. Don't forget, jump sharp on my lights. Good-by and good luck," he said, moving forward.

He was the man who was going to give us the signals and drop us as precisely and neatly as he could. Some of these men later got so expert that they were able to drop people in small clearings in woods and even in places as small as back gardens.

The sergeant opened the trap, and a great gush of warm scented air swept in. From twelve thousand feet we had come down to less than a thousand, and the engines seemed to be barely turning over.

"Look at that moonlight! We must be as easy to spot as in broad daylight," remarked someone.

A country road, isolated moonlit houses slid under our eyes, then a railway line and a station with its lights and signals like rubies, and immediately after, the narrow winding streets of a small provincial town lit up as in peacetime.

"Châteauroux," said my neighbor, leaning over my shoulder. And as we banked slowly round a toppling, drunken steeple he added: "Might as well drop us on the roof of the police station while they're about it. Talk about letting everyone know we're here!"

We were now flying low over more country roads that shone like metal in the moonlight, some fields, a wood, a silver river spanned by a chalk-white bridge, and a red light flickered inside the plane as we banked steeply.

"First three, get ready!" shouted the sergeant.

I was to go third in the first stick. Legs outspread each side of number one, already sitting on the edge of the dropping funnel, I was ready to move forward into his place. Facing us sat number two, who was to drop immediately after number one while I would be moving up to the edge of the funnel.

The engines again slowed down, and we felt the plane lurch as, grinning at us, the sergeant raised his thumb. The red light had gone out.

"Go!" he shouted as the green light flashed on, and instantly number one dropped out of sight. In turn the man in front of me went

down, head up, as stiff as a Guardsman on parade. I could still see him dropping as I started sliding down.

That drop! That fearful, nightmarish, endless drop! It seemed that this time it would never end, and I was going to shout when my harness tightened with a jerk.

Straight ahead, almost level with the treetops, it seemed, the bomber was already banking. Below, a man was running toward me. A pull on the harness to ease the touch-down, and I rolled over like a shot rabbit. Even as I was still rolling I had found my pistol and thrown up the safety catch, and I now stood hunched up, facing the man still running toward me as my parachute settled gently between us.

"Welcome to France," he panted, holding out both his hands. "Oh, you can put your gun away. There's no danger here!" he laughed, not realizing that I had thought him the danger.

With his knife the French peasant made the sign of the cross on the back of the loaf he was about to cut while his wife gave us large helpings of a giant omelet.

Long before our plane had even left England she had laid out her best crockery, the beautifully embroidered napkins, and her real crystal glasses, those that only came out of the dresser for grand occasions such as christenings, weddings, and funerals.

Hungry as wolves and having completely forgotten all about the wonderful dinner we had engulfed less than five hours ago, we all thoroughly enjoyed our first meal in France.

Standing by the kitchen stove, the young man who had first shaken hands with me was carefully drying thousand-franc notes by putting them, two at a time, in a large frying pan. They belonged to the last man of the second stick, who had jumped a fraction too late and who had come down in the pond at the end of the field. His clothes were drying over the fire, and eating in his underwear certainly did not affect his appetite, which seemed even bigger than ours.

We all turned to stone, however, when a call from outside was followed by a rap on one of the kitchen shutters.

"Don't worry, it's my son Jean," said our host. "The dogs would have barked otherwise. Besides, you are well guarded; we have people

on the lookout in every direction, and no one could come within a kilometer of the farm without our being warned, and you would have plenty of time to disappear."

"*Bonjour la compagnie,*" said a tall lanky boy blinking under the light.

"What news, son?"

"Nothing, all is quiet. The gentlemen who are taking the train will be able to walk to the station quite easily, and Pierre is bringing the bicycles for the two who have to cross the line in the morning."

Two of our group were going to Paris and, since we had been dropped in unoccupied France, would have to cross the famous demarcation line into occupied France.

The cold drizzle occasionally hid the cyclist advancing slowly ahead of us. We hurried in order to keep him in sight, for it had been agreed that, should he stop to light a cigarette, we were to get off the road immediately and cut across country. We came round a bend of the road, and there, straight ahead of us, was the white stone bridge I had seen from the air, and at the other end of it our guide was lighting a cigarette as two gendarmes came up to him.

Jumping into the ditch, pushing through a hedge, and running into a wood the other side of a field took us less than a minute. We were not really uneasy, because we knew that gendarmes on the road was a normal hazard, and, anyway, we had plenty of time to catch our train.

Every detail had been fixed before leaving the farm, and we knew exactly what we had to do. We made our way down to the river, where after a few minutes' walk we found the shed and by it the boat the farmer had told us about. The stream was quite narrow at that point, and one good shove sent us gently across.

I tied the boat to a tree and followed my companion, who was heading for another wood. Suddenly he dropped to the ground, and I dropped in my tracks and waited a full minute before moving up to his shoulder as silently as I could. Without turning his head, he pointed ahead, a little to our left.

Within twenty yards of us, a rifle slung across his arms, a man was standing under a tree, waiting. His back was turned, and he seemed

to be gazing at the pearly streak of sky that announced the coming of day.

It took us quite a while to crawl away, and it was only some ten minutes later that we were able to start walking, bending low behind the hedges round the fields.

"He's not alone, there are others," whispered my companion a little later. "Look, under those trees over there . . . two more of them . . . also armed."

"What does it mean? Do you think they are looking for us?"

"Someone must have seen us drop. The whole district is probably cordoned."

"Think we can make it?"

"If there is just the one line of them, we've managed to get through. There is the railway line. I'll go ahead to see if it's guarded."

Five minutes later he was back; there was no one in sight. We were soon in the station trying to look unconcerned among the small crowd of people waiting for the Lyons train which finally arrived almost an hour late.

We found an empty third-class compartment. The train was at last beginning to pull out when my companion muttered:

"Don't move. Here come two of them running down the platform."

The carriage door opened and, pushing his gun between our legs, a man climbed in and turned to help another behind him.

"Just made it," said the second, panting. "Did you get anything?"

"Yes, one small rabbit."

"Oh, well, the main thing is that we didn't miss the opening of the hunting season after all," he laughed and, turning toward us, added: "N'*est-ce pas, messieurs?*"

"The hunting season? But . . . I thought all arms, even shotguns, had to be——"

"Ah! I can see that Monsieur has just come from the other side!"

"From the other side? I . . . I don't understand . . ."

"Come, monsieur. You have just crossed from occupied France, haven't you? Don't worry, we won't tell. But, you see, here in unoccupied France we still have the right to hunt. Only birds and rabbits, of

course, but one of these days," he said, winking, "one of these days it might be more interesting game."

My companion smiled. I smiled too at the thought that there were yet a good many things we did not know and had never thought of. I also shuddered at the thought of what might have happened, had we been parachuted at dawn, instead of in the middle of the night, in a countryside full of trigger-happy hunters, perhaps not all of them such good patriots as our two enthusiasts.

14

It was the first time I had had to change my ration-card tickets. Tickets for bread, meat, sugar, fats, et cetera, had to be collected or exchanged once a month. People lined up at schools and *mairies* and other public buildings where they were distributed on certain days of each month. Remembering all I had been told about precautions to be taken in exchanging my ration tickets, I had chosen a large *mairie* in an important town, and after carefully watching others I had joined a long line of people where I had every chance of being at last attended to by a grumpy and tired girl who would stamp my card without examining it too closely and give me the corresponding tickets for the month.

I thus found myself in one of the large *mairies* of Lyons, the one where most travelers went to for their ration tickets. In the big hall usually reserved for weddings and other ceremonies, long lines of people—mostly housewives but with here and there an isolated man—led up to a large table, behind which seven girls in white overalls examined ration cards, cut out certain unused tickets before stamping them, and finally handed them back with new sheets of tickets.

I politely offered to hold my neighbor's cards while she dug out a handkerchief with which to blow one of her little boys' noses. During this difficult and noisy operation I discreetly compared her card with mine and felt much relieved they were exactly alike. Mine bore the name of Gérard Touché; it was the name of a greengrocer I knew well in one of the most populous quarters of Paris, immediately be-

hind the Church of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, and who, I knew, would very willingly agree to become my "uncle."

My heart thumping nevertheless when my turn came, I held out my open card. Without looking up the girl took it, raised her pen, put it down again, closed the card and examined it back and front before going through it page by page, and finally looking up at me for the first time, she said:

"This is not a real card, monsieur."

"Not a real card? What makes you think . . . ? What do you mean?"

"Just a moment. I'll see if I can get you another," she said, getting up, not troubling to answer my questions.

I watched her talking over the shoulder of a man sitting in front of a small desk in a corner of the hall. Her chief? A police inspector? A first sudden panic passed slowly through my aching legs. To make a dash for the door was the one urge I must resist at all costs. Glancing round I could see a policeman standing by it, explaining something to two young girls. No, I could never make it. And even supposing I did, supposing I did get out of the *mairie* safely, still I would be lost because my name would be known and I would be without a ration card and no idea where to get another! And living without a ration card seemed an impossibility (I had only just arrived and was soon to discover that, as ever, "impossible" is the only word of the French language that has no real meaning.

At last the girl in the white overalls came back to the table with my card. All was not lost, then. Without a word of explanation she took a new ration card out of a padlocked box, carefully copied my name and address onto it, stamped it with two different stamps, took it to the man at the small desk who stamped it a third time and signed it, and again returned to her seat where she picked up the sheets of ration tickets for the month.

"There!" she said with a smile, handing me the new card.

"Mademoiselle, I don't know what to say . . ."

"Don't thank me, but try not to lose that one . . . Next please!" she called, tearing up my old card.

Barely an hour later I was sitting in the restaurant car of the Marseilles train. I had planned on staying two more days in Lyons,

but after my adventure at the *mairie* I had decided to be on the safe side and to move. Of course I had left the *mairie* without hurrying and outwardly quite calm, but the long walk down the marble steps, where again I had resisted the sudden urge to gallop along like the boys who suddenly passed me, proved quite an ordeal. I was trembling when I at last reached the street and my legs ached as though I had just walked a hundred miles nonstop. But my head was quite clear, and I knew exactly the best way of going about my move. The very first thing was of course to make sure that I had not been followed out of the *mairie*. A short stroll along the quays soon proved that I was not being shadowed. Applying every rule, however, I twice walked past my hotel before crossing the street and entering—just to make sure that it was not being watched from outside. Inside was of course a risk I had to run; not returning to the hotel might prove a bigger risk in the long run. Packing my bag, paying the bill, and leaving was soon done.

Four travelers were eating in silence. Their table was the only one of the restaurant car where people were not talking. The tall blond "tourist" had tried to engage in conversation with his neighbor but had met with no success, much to the evident satisfaction of the two Frenchmen sitting opposite them. Neither the "tourist" nor the travelers facing them could have possibly guessed that the man with the horn-rimmed spectacles who had just carefully torn out a bread ticket from a sheet taken from a brand-new ration card was an English officer who only a week ago had probably been lunching at his club in London.

At the end of the meal the man with the spectacles had slowly torn up a tiny piece of colored paper before gingerly pushing the minute particles through a slit of the aeration window just above his head. He had just found that tiny piece of colored paper glued to a pin stuck under the lapel of his vest. Of course without even looking at it he was the only one to know that it was a British Red Cross flag, a flag he had bought in Oxford Street only two days before and which had somehow not been noticed, even by the expert searchers.

And though the two men facing him may have wondered why he smiled so broadly as he pushed the little bits of paper out of the win-

dow, neither of them could possibly have guessed that he was smiling because, before tearing up the little flag, he had for a second been tempted to pin it discreetly on the back of his neighbor, the blond "tourist."

15

Two years before the war the Schneider family had moved into a little cottage close to the woods of Ville d'Avray between Paris and Versailles. Francis was a traveling salesman. Tall and fair-haired, he was quite an athlete and had even played hockey for France on various occasions. On his return to Ville d'Avray not very long after the armistice, he had become the representative of a Swiss firm of pharmaceutical products, and now often his charming little wife was left alone for weeks with their young boy.

Of course Schneider is a German-sounding name, and he was tall and fair; but that was not all, and his poor wife was sad. Twice already she had had to go round to see the headmaster of her son's school, because he had been cruelly beaten by other boys who called him "*frisé*," a substitute for the word "Boche," which had been forbidden. As a matter of fact, she seemed happier when her husband was away. No sooner was he back than the whole neighborhood seemed to avoid and shun them; shopkeepers became sullen, and when Francis walked into the café by the station for his *apéritif* conversations simply ceased. He never seemed to notice; talkative and ever ready to burst out laughing, he was always saying that the Germans had a fantastic organization, that they were born organizers and that, after all, taken individually, most of them were pacifists . . . although they at least really knew the meaning of discipline!

"You'll see," he would say, wagging his finger, "the day will come when we shall be grateful to them for having saved us from rot and

decay . . . Ah! If only the *maréchal* [Marshal Pétain] was a little younger!"

Only the café owner, standing behind his bar, would acquiesce with a nod or a "yes, of course" that did not mean much.

The Germans, on the other hand, seemed to like Francis. True that he spoke German fluently and that he had on occasion acted as interpreter for those stationed in the vicinity. There were quite a lot of anti-aircraft guns in the woods at the top of the hill overlooking Paris.

It was the day after a parachutist had been reported in the woods of Ville d'Avray that things came to a head. Though over eighty old Mathieu could still walk without the help of a stick. He never minced his words, but if about to say something particularly nasty he had a way of wiping his long white mustache that made all his sons, daughters, and grandchildren tremble. He was at the café with the youngest of his grandsons when Francis arrived with the two gendarmes.

Francis had returned from one of his long trips the night before, and many people had seen him helping the police and the Germans search the woods for the parachutist. The alert had been given by two gunners on duty who had seen a man dropping at about one in the morning. It was Francis who had finally found the parachute early that morning and who had triumphantly marched all the way to the gendarmery with the heavy silk bundle hanging over his shoulder.

The *belote* players became suddenly very silent when Francis ordered *apéritifs* for the two gendarmes. Their eyes were fixed on old Mathieu, who had put down his cards and carefully wiped his mustache. In spite of the hand of his grandson timidly laid on his sleeve, he got slowly up.

Francis saw him coming in the mirror behind the bar but did not turn.

"You haven't found him yet?" asked old Mathieu, tapping Francis on the shoulder.

"No, *Père Mathieu*. Have a drink with us. What will it be?"

"Nothing . . . I don't drink with bastards such as you."

And coming quite close to Francis, who was standing gaping like a fish, he had taken careful aim and shot a great spittle right into his open mouth.

Very white and with trembling hands, Francis picked up his glass, washed out his mouth, and spat on the floor. Taking a twenty-franc note out of his wallet, he pushed it across the counter and made for the door.

"We'll talk about that some other day, Father Mathieu."

"I think you had better forget all about it, that is . . . if you want to live," said Mathieu's grandson, quietly standing by the door.

"You . . . you don't understand," shrugged Francis, stepping outside.

Embarrassed and silent, the round-eyed gendarmes watched old Mathieu return to his seat, push his cap right to the back of his head, pick up his cards, examine them, and announce a hundred and fifty for four nines.

But old Mathieu died before the Liberation and thus never knew that Francis was an officer of the Royal Air Force, who had almost been caught the night before he had so cruelly insulted him.

It was true that Francis had only come back the night before but not quite as early as people thought—a little after one in the morning, as a matter of fact. It was also true that he went for long trips and that this one had been particularly long, since it had taken him all the way to London via Toulouse, Madrid, and Gibraltar.

It was not the first time that he had been dropped in the vicinity of his home; this time, however, he had not only missed the clearing and had a good deal of trouble climbing down to the ground, but he had been spotted.

As usual, his wife had had confirmation of his arrival by listening to the B.B.C. personal messages after the nine o'clock news. The one about the "green scarf for Elaine" was the one for her, the one that meant that Francis would be home sometime that night. She had heard the plane hovering, and she had promptly got up to warm up some coffee she had prepared before going to bed.

She had been waiting and listening for a long, long time, it seemed, when at last she heard the creak of the front gate. And then she heard his footsteps, and her hand shook over the coffeepot, because she had never heard Francis run before. She heard him closing the cellar door under the terrace, the one she always left open at night when he

was away, and at last he had run up the cellar steps and burst into the kitchen.

"Quick," he said, holding out a small black suitcase. "I have been spotted. Put that under the kid's mattress."

He tugged at the long zip fasteners of his gray overalls and quickly stepped out of them.

"And now, you go to bed . . . No, take this pistol first and throw it out of the bedroom window onto the lawn. Quick, we've one chance of getting away with it!"

Without a word, without a kiss, just a sort of twisted smile—the best she was able to do—his wife had run upstairs with the suitcase and the pistol.

Francis tore off his collar and tie, stripped off his coat and waistcoat, let down his braces, turned off the gas under the coffeepot, took a look at himself in a small mirror hanging behind the kitchen door, grinned and tousled up his hair, and dashed to open the front door as a German officer was ringing at the gate.

"It's a parachutist, isn't it? I thought so! I saw him run across the garden."

"Are you sure, Monsieur Francis?"

"I saw him as I see you, *mon Lieutenant*. Look, come this way; he must have gone round the house and found the small door by the chicken run."

"You are right, Monsieur Francis," said the German, stooping and picking up an automatic pistol from the lawn. "He dropped this."

For over three hours he accompanied the Germans patrolling the woods with the French gendarmes who had been fetched from Versailles. It was finally he who had spotted the parachute tangled in the branches of a tree. It was broad daylight when he at last got home.

"Here, drink this coffee and then to bed with you. You must be dead," said his wife.

"No, dear, I'm all right. All I need is a cold bath. I must take that suitcase into Paris this morning."

At eight o'clock, still smiling, he gladly accepted the *Oberleutnant's* offer of a lift down to the bus stop at the Pont de Sèvres. His suitcase in one hand, he shook hands with the German under the far too indifferent eyes of the people waiting for the bus.

Francis was fast asleep, his suitcase between his legs, when at the Porte de Saint-Cloud a German gendarme touched his shoulder:

"What have you in that suitcase?"

"A radio transmitter," said Francis, gaping.

"*Ach!*" said the German with a shrug, and many people in the bus grinned, little dreaming that he had answered truthfully.

At noon, having finished all he wanted to do, Francis found himself walking slowly up the Champs Elysées toward a half dozen tanks he had seen from the bus earlier that morning and which he wanted to see a little closer. Never had the trees of Paris seemed so beautiful, he thought, wondering if the absence of traffic and petrol fumes had anything to do with it. Martial music made him look round. A German army band with all its spangles and bells was marching up toward the Arch of Triumph. As Francis stood watching, a road sweeper, his broom under his arm, stopped by him.

"Pity an English plane doesn't come over just now. It would be fun to see them run for a change."

"Do they do that every day?"

"Every day on the stroke of twelve. When I hear them, I know it's time to go to lunch," explained the road sweeper, turning his back to the street as the band marched by, its brasses blaring.

"Yes, it would be funny," said Francis thoughtfully.

The next day Francis had nothing to do, and since four of the gunners stationed near his house had a day's leave he offered to show them round Paris a little, and as it was Thursday—Thursdays and Sundays are closing days in French schools—he took his son along.

All that afternoon they walked around Paris, four heavy-booted men and a civilian with a little boy. Passers-by never seemed to see the German soldiers, but with few exceptions their eyes focused with a strange obstinacy on the civilian accompanying them. Taking no notice, Francis walked his little troop from the Louvre to the Opéra, along the boulevards to the Madeleine and to the Place de la Concorde. In the Tuileries gardens he even bought them a picture post card showing the Marly horses, which had disappeared from the bottom end of the Champs Elysées the night before the Germans entered Paris. With his small camera he took pictures of his son holding the hands of the grinning Germans standing in front of the Obelisk.

The tanks he had seen the day before were still by the Grand Palais. He did not seem to be taking much notice of all the sergeant was saying about Russia, where these new heavy tanks were performing miracles, but rather worried about his boy, who had climbed the tracks toward a German standing by an open turret. Francis smiled when he saw the soldier put his hand out to help the child and laughed and took a picture when he made him stand on something inside the turret. Francis took another picture of his boy when he was about to jump down into the outstretched arms of another soldier.

Two days later Francis left on another of his journeys, the very night when about eleven o'clock there was a short air-raid warning in the Paris region. There were even a few shots fired toward Saint-Cloud. The Parisians later discovered (because Parisians always get to know things) that a strange little airplane of the R.A.F.—it was a Lysander—had landed to pick up a man on the long stretch of grass of Bagatelle in the Bois de Boulogne. What they never learned, however, was that that man was Francis, who had insisted on and himself arranged the reception end of this highly dangerous "pickup," the only way of getting back quickly with important documents. As to the important documents, they were two small photographs of a boy on a tank, the first pictures to arrive in England of the new German Tiger tanks. Francis himself had put down the three landing lights for the pilot, and the operation had gone off without a hitch. After a perfect three-point landing the plane had never once stopped taxiing; Francis had run and caught the iron ladder as the plane turned at one end of the field, the pilot gave it the gun, and his machine was airborne in a matter of seconds, exactly fifty-four after his touch-down on French soil.

A few weeks later, sharp at noon, just as the German band was marching proudly up the Champs Elysées, a British airplane flying very low and very fast was in sight of Paris. On the Neuilly bridge people looked up and scattered when it started diving toward the Seine. But no, it roared up the Avenue de la Grande Armée at treetop level, looked as if it was going to crash into the Arch of Triumph, bounced over it like a ping-pong ball, and plunged on, down the Champs Elysées, this time all its eight guns spitting a hail of gaily colored tracer bullets that seemed to converge on the German band

that had suddenly stopped playing and the members of which were either running in every direction at surprising speeds or sprawling across the road and even in the gutter.

I later met the unlucky Alsatian schoolteacher who happened to be walking by the very spot with thirty of her girls. There had been no air-raid warning, and she had barely had time to make her girls crouch down as the airplane came roaring down toward them, but many of the girls realized what was really going on, and, standing up, they had fearlessly started shouting and waving to the pilot, who was by then busy banking up over the Louvre and Notre-Dame. The poor woman was arrested that afternoon and questioned for a good many hours by Gestapo men who were convinced that she must have had advance knowledge of the raid to be there with her girls, at the right spot and the right time. She had a lot of trouble proving her innocence.

Captain Francis has since often wondered whether the road sweeper had seen the show, whether it had pleased him, and whether he remembered one day telling a stranger all about his daydream.

16

A gray felt hat with a small green feather had been much more difficult to find than I had expected. I had had to go from hatshop to hatshop before at last finding the precious object. Three times had I carefully read my instructions before destroying the flimsy piece of toilet paper on which they were penciled. I was to arrive wearing a gray felt hat with a green feather; on leaving the station I was to enter the Café de la Boule d'Or and ask at what time the bus for Lafaille was due. I would then be told that the last had left a good hour ago, and one of the customers present would then propose running me up in his car. He would be the man I had come to meet.

All this seemed rather too complicated, I thought, and lecturing about new explosives was not really my job. But . . . there was no one available . . . and this small resistance movement up in the mountains was extremely keen . . . and seeing a real British officer would be a great morale booster for them . . . and, in any case, they had just received a considerable quantity of dangerous explosives which they knew nothing about . . . and, after all, I had nothing to do just then . . . and, and . . . and . . . I had finally accepted.

The wheezing, clanging local train, which panted and stopped whenever the going got too steep and which stopped longer still at every station to give the engine time to get over its heart attack, finally reached my station, the one where I was supposed to get out. Grabbing my small suitcase, I pulled down over my head the gray felt hat with the green feather, an extraordinary affair which would probably have been a little on the large side for a man like Einstein.

I was the only traveler to get off, and the stationmaster-booking-clerk-signal-box-operator-ticket-collector-porter promptly fixed his two

bulbous eyes on my hat and took my ticket without even glancing at it. I could understand the man's interest in such a hat, but it was awkward, especially when I was doing my best to pass unnoticed!

On the dusty open space pompously called Place de la Gare two gendarmes were standing. Gripping my suitcase tight and trying to look unconcerned, I walked rapidly by them, giving them a little nod, as though I was used to coming often to this Godforsaken spot. But the little nod was a mistake, and I could almost hear their eyes popping as it sent my beautiful felt hat slowly round toward my ear, behind which drops of sweat were by now running down into my collar.

As to the man with the beret sitting on the edge of the ten-foot pavement-proof-of-civilization in front of the Café-Hôtel de la Boule d'Or, he would certainly not have squinted any harder had I walked by wearing Nelson's hat.

Pushing aside a heavy bead curtain, I almost fell down two steps into the main room of the café, where three men leaning against the counter were talking loudly. The proprietor, who stood facing them the other side of the bar, stopped wiping the glass in his hand and stared at me. His three clients stopped talking and slowly turned round, and they in turn took but one short look at me before fixing definitely their eyes on my hat.

"At what time does the next bus go by for Lafaille?" I asked in a high thin voice that reminded me of my first long trousers.

"You are lucky. It is late today," said one of the three men leaning against the bar.

"Of course not! It went by long ago," almost shouted a man I had not noticed, sitting in a dark corner behind the only table in the room.

"Monsieur Pierre, you're crazy! You know full well that we take that bus every evening and that if we are still here it is simply that it hasn't gone by yet."

"Yes? Well . . . maybe it won't come by today, then. Look, monsieur, I am going up to Lafaille with my car. If you like, I'll run you up."

"I—— I don't know what to say . . . I'm very grateful . . ."

"Ah . . . you are careful of strangers? You are quite right," he said in a sort of stage whisper, and, getting up, he solemnly put on his hat . . . a green felt hat with a gray feather!

I was so surprised that I couldn't help taking off mine.

"Keep your hat on, monsieur," he said with a smile of satisfaction and a reassuring wink. "The sun is still very hot outside."

The bus caught up with us on a bend of the mountain road where my host had pulled up to let his bubbling engine cool off a little. Although it shot round in a cloud of dust and charcoal fumes I got a glimpse of all its passengers craning their necks to get another good look at our hats.

"You dine with us, and later this evening I shall drive you down to the meeting, which is set for midnight," explained my host as he drove through a gate at the end of a narrow valley.

A lady was waiting for us on the small wooden veranda leading into the house. My host merely introduced me as "the friend we were expecting." The dinner was good and the wines excellent.

"Here is something which you probably miss a good deal," said the lady of the house with a tender motherly smile as she poured a pinkish, steaming decoction out of a jug.

"Thank you, madame, but I do not usually——"

"It is tea," whispered my host.

Tea, even good tea, is not exactly the thing to drink after a fruity burgundy of the right year. However, I managed to swallow the strange beverage while my hosts were arguing and fiddling with a radio set so that I could hear the B.B.C. news in English!

The tea made me feel vaguely sick, and I was getting very sleepy indeed when I was informed it was time to leave.

"My wife is coming also . . . as secretary, of course. Don't forget your hat!"

"Is it really necessary?"

We had to push the car as far as the road, because it would not start. After that it was easy going, since it was all downhill and some of it pretty steep too. Every now and then my host would gingerly let in the clutch, but it was only on one of the last hairpin bends that the engine suddenly started coughing, and by the time we finally arrived outside the Café-Hôtel de la Boule d'Or it was banging away like an old Hotchkiss machine gun about to jam.

"Isn't this where I met you today?"

"Yes, that is where we hold our meetings. The proprietor is one of my lieutenants."

The proprietor had most certainly heard and recognized the explosions of our little car, but he only opened his shuttered door by a bare foot—and we all had to slide in sideways—after the three sharp raps followed by the two slow ones on the window shutters.

Lit by two paraffin lamps, the café seemed bigger than I had thought. Some twenty people were waiting by almost as many bottles of champagne. I promptly recognized some of them; first, the two gendarmes, then the stationmaster, and the man with the beret. All were grinning sheepishly.

"Formidable, the trick of the hat, wasn't it?" said my host, slapping the proprietor on the back.

"That it was," he exclaimed, popping a cork. "Monsieur Pierre said to us: 'You can't miss him. He will have a gray felt hat with a green feather'!"

The lecture started after the champagne and a speech from the local schoolteacher followed by more champagne. The two gendarmes unpacked enough explosives to blow the whole village, including the railway station and the Café-Hôtel de la Boule d'Or, right to the other side of the valley and back again.

"What do you do with all those electric wires and no electricity?" asked the stationmaster.

"Those are not electric wires, but Bickford cordite. This one detonates instantly, and that one burns slowly."

"Ah! What did I tell you?" said my host delightedly. "Think, monsieur, I was ten years in the Fourteenth Regiment of Engineers. Those were the days, messieurs . . . none of those ersatz explosives which only small safe-crackers would have touched! No, those were the days of good, solid dynamite."

Without attempting to remark that times had changed I explained the various ways of using the explosives, how to place charges, and how to calculate the minimum quantity necessary for an efficient job.

"But, surely, you need more than that to blow up a bridge!" interrupted my host at one moment.

Not wanting to cause any ill feelings and watching Monsieur Pierre's wife, who had stopped taking shorthand notes, I answered:

"Well, of course, much depends on the size of the bridge, the materials used in its construction, and the way in which it is built, but don't forget that a hundred grams of this explosive will easily do as much damage as a kilogram of dynamite."

My host said not a word, but his smile had gone, and I could see doubt in his eyes.

It was only some weeks later that I learned of his misadventure. Further up the valley he had a little summer chalet where he had decided to carry out a test on his own. He had taken up an old iron trunk and put in it what he considered enough explosives to blow off the locked lid; as a supplementary precaution he had put two bags of cement over the lid, and after having lit the Bickford with his cigarette he had walked outside to see just how muffled the sound of the explosion would be.

Down in the valley it was a very sullen hot day, with heavy gray clouds draping the mountains and hanging right down to the trees. That is why no one paid any attention to the single thunderclap that echoed back and forth for a few seconds. But for Monsieur Pierre it had been quite a surprise: He had seen his chalet suddenly swell as doors and windows belched a yellowish flame and then gently collapse in front of him like a pack of playing cards.

17

It was in an important town of Auvergne, a town where many Alsatian refugees had settled, that I met Albert for the first time. When in that town, rather than go to a hotel where all travelers had to fill out police cards—an unpleasant and ever dangerous thing to do, which we avoided as much as possible—I usually stayed with one of our good friends, an Alsatian journalist who lived there with his wife and two children. They were most hospitable people, and since I could not always let them know in advance of my visits it had simply been decided that the drawing-room couch which made a really excellent bed would always be at my disposal.

The only thing that worried me a little was the number of people always coming and going, or staying with them. Often my host would introduce me and tell his friends who and what I was. Once or twice I had asked him if he was quite sure of all his friends; he had laughed and said that he would never introduce me to anyone about whom he was not absolutely sure. I must say that he always took every conceivable precaution regarding my security. Whenever he knew that I was coming I was sure to find him at the station. He would pretend not to know me and simply follow me all the way home, just to make sure that I was not being shadowed, an unpleasant thing one usually notices after a while though not always soon enough. When approaching the flat where he lived one could tell all sorts of interesting things merely by the way the curtains were arranged. It was really quite a complicated little code which, as an honorary member of the family, I had had to learn. By a glance at the windows I could thus tell who

was in and who was out, whether there were any visitors, how many, what sort of visitors, and, finally, whether one could come up or not. The concierge, also an Alsatian, never asked any questions of visitors, but just behind her bed, by the door, was a push button connected to a discreet little buzzer in my friend's flat. Though they never knew it visitors were thus always announced; there again there was a code, three buzzes for an unknown visitor, and a succession of short buzzes after meant: "suspicious."

In spite of all these precautions I could not help feeling annoyed the day Monsieur Schoeffer told me he wished to introduce me to a young boy.

"I am sorry. I know you do not like it, my dear friend, but he is such a good boy, and he has been after me for weeks now, asking me to put him in touch with the English!"

"How old is the boy, Monsieur Schoeffer? Do you think he ought to know that you can put people in touch with the English?"

"Oh yes. He is only fifteen but so very serious, you know . . . even though he does not look his age. You see, the Germans shot his mother and father on the dining-room table, in front of him. I trust him as I would trust few people."

"Where is he?" I asked, still annoyed.

"He will lunch with us today—my wife invited him. Like that, you can see him and talk to him before deciding whether or not we can tell him who you are. He sees all sorts of people when he comes here and will not pay much attention if we only present you as Monsieur Touché."

To my mind, Albert looked more like a boy of twelve trying to pass off for a young man of fifteen. There was something ludicrous and tragic in the way he dressed like a grownup. He wanted to act like a man, and he did so most convincingly, yet there was something so boyish, not to say babyish, about his pale little face with its long pointed nose and aggressive chin that poor Madame Schoeffer's eyes would fill with tears as she piled more food on his plate than he could possibly eat in a day.

Introduced as a friend from Bordeaux, I soon discovered that Albert was not very talkative when he did not really know who people

were, and when I tried to bring the conversation round to the war in Russia he simply closed up like an oyster.

"Albert," said our host on a nod from me as Madame Schoeffer served the coffee—real coffee, "I have kept my promise. This gentleman is an English officer."

"I thought so," said Albert, taking the cigarette I offered him. "Of course you don't look like an Englishman, but you are so different to the usual run of people I see here that there were only two possibilities: either you were a vague friend, not at all in our line of business, or you were the English officer. And as Madame Schoeffer would probably not have invited me to lunch only to meet a vague friend I thought you must be the officer."

I could not help smiling at the boy's logic; he was not trying to brag, I was sure, but simply stating what had gone on in his mind during our lunch.

Albert then said all he had to say in less than two minutes. Clearly and simply he gave me every reason why he thought he could make a good secret agent. Many of them were most convincing. He assured me, for instance, that his German was perfect and that he could very easily go to Germany at any time. Dressed as a little boy, no one could possibly suspect him, he thought.

"No, I am sorry, Albert. My chiefs would never accept such an arrangement, and I would not like to propose it to them. I am certain you could have been of tremendous help to us if you had only been four or five years older. Albert, I think the best you can do is to carry on with your studies and, needless to say, forget all about this conversation."

"Well, monsieur, if you can't use me as an agent can you have me sent to London? They can probably do with people who can speak French and German as I do."

"There you are, Albert. I am sorry too," said Monsieur Schoeffer gently. "I keep telling him that what he is doing at present is quite sufficient," he added, turning to me.

Albert rose and did not insist. He said that, should I change my mind, I could easily reach him through Monsieur Schoeffer.

After having seen him to the door my host told me how Albert was the only support of his grandmother and an invalid aunt. They lived

quite comfortably in a warm little flat on the outskirts of the town on the proceeds of Albert's strange and very much illegal business. At regular intervals he would go off to Alsace, pilfer stocks of German saccharine, bring it back to unoccupied France, and sell it at record prices.

A few weeks later I indirectly received a long message from London, the sort of message that had probably been sent to several of us. Could we, if at all possible, find out something—anything, in fact—about a piece of machinery that was being turned out in an Alsatian factory hidden away in the Vosges Mountains, a few miles from the Col de la Schlucht. It was thought that it might have something to do with a safety device for automatically pulling bombers and fighters out of dives, should the pilot find himself unable to do so for any reason.

Going into Alsace was extremely risky, but in that deserted mountain region, which we knew to be particularly well guarded, such a trip would amount to suicide. After talking it over for hours, it seemed, with Monsieur Schoeffer and a railway employee, a friend of his who still had his family in that region, they both persuaded me to see what Albert would have to say about it.

He came round early next morning, evidently delighted, and listened to my explanations. It appeared that, not only did he know that part of the country, but also the factory, a biscuit-tin factory where some of his cousins had worked before the war. He right away gave us a lot of useful data on its precise location, the roads leading to it, and the names of the nearest villages.

"Albert, I won't ask whether you would be willing to go there, because I know the answer. Instead I would like to say that you can go on one condition."

"What condition?" he asked, frowning.

"That throughout the trip you will strictly follow my instructions."

"Of course. Surely that is not a condition, is it?"

"Yes, it is, and listen carefully to my instructions. If you wish you can go, but—here is the but!—you are not to run any silly sort of risk, do you understand? In an affair of this sort there is usually a possibility of buying sketches or plans, or a photograph, or something. You say you have many friends in that region? You can therefore work indirectly through any of those whom you feel you can trust without any

direct contacts of any sort. In other words, all I really want you to do is prepare the ground for an agent that we can perhaps send in later with some little chance of success. Do you think you can do just that?"

Albert blushed and refused the money I wanted to give him for his trip. He assured me that, should he need any money, he could always find enough. It was he who suggested that we should meet in exactly a week's time in Monsieur Schoeffer's flat.

A secret agent abroad is without a doubt continually risking his life, but the intensity of the risk can vary considerably, almost as much as that of the soldier who joins up and goes through four or five years of training, square bashing, and whatnot for a few minutes, sometimes less, of real action. In France the risk for us was often negligible. It was possible to surround oneself with such a web of defenses, advance warnings, and alarm signals that one had to be really unlucky to get caught. I know one of our men who, brutally cut off from all his contacts after a cascade of arrests and finding himself first unable to go back to any of his hide-outs, without a penny, and at last chased from street to street in a town in the North of France, simply walked into a baker's shop and explained that he was an allied officer being chased by the Gestapo.

"In the cellar with you, then, quick!" said the baker, opening the trap behind his counter.

He lived there for several weeks before getting away to Spain.

There are also the periods of total inaction. They too have their dangers, because more often than not people begin to wonder about a man who seems to have nothing to do, who does not apparently have a job to go to. It was therefore necessary in such cases to find some sort of activity or to give an impression of activity, if only by going out and returning at regular hours. Even if he suffers from a bad cold a traveler that does not leave his hotel room attracts attention, a thing a secret agent cannot afford to do.

In this particular case I had the advantage of staying with friends who knew perfectly well what I was up to. Still I had to be careful, because in the long run neighbors might begin to notice my continued presence in the flat or even in the neighborhood.

The day for Albert's return arrived at last. Monsieur Schoeffer was nervous, and we ate lunch in silence; Albert had not turned up on

time. The afternoon dragged out as certain Sunday afternoons of my childhood used to drag out. At six o'clock my host got up without a word and put on his overcoat.

"Must you go?" asked his wife.

"Only to the station, dear. He might be on the six twenty-eight train from Lyons."

Dinner still without Albert was even worse than lunch. We were both trying to comfort Madame Schoeffer by telling her the things we knew so well, that such delays were normal and to be expected in our work, that a few hours, even a day or two meant nothing, and we stopped when we realized that we were only trying to convince ourselves that Albert might still be safe.

He finally arrived as Monsieur Schoeffer was on the point of going to the station for the third time. He was panting and dirty, and his pale little face was drawn with fatigue, but the twinkle in his eyes was reassuring.

"Come and eat first," said Madame Schoeffer, hugging him. "You can talk to those two after."

"Yes, thank you. I've had nothing to eat since yesterday. But you must first of all help me bring up the sack I left downstairs with the concierge."

"Your sack can wait. What is it?" asked Madame Schoeffer.

"Something for you and something for the English," said Albert as we all went down.

From a fifty-kilo sack of potatoes which we emptied on the kitchen floor Albert took out a box wrapped in rags. It was about the size of a typewriter.

"It might be possible to get plans," explained Albert, "but it would certainly take time. So I thought this might do as well."

"What is it, Albert?"

"The machine you are so interested in," he said, laughing.

He would never tell us how he had obtained it. He simply assured us he had not run "much risk" getting it. He also explained that he was late because instead of taking the train with his sack of potatoes he had preferred to wait for a man he knew who was coming his way with a whole truckload of sacks of potatoes!

No, the trip hadn't cost him a penny, really! What he wanted? Go

to England. All I could do was promise to apply for a passage for him, but I warned him that it might take some time, at least several weeks, and perhaps much longer.

Some two months later I was enjoying a few days' leave when I got an early morning call from one of our security officers. Did I know a French child named Albert? . . . Yes? . . . Well, he had arrived in England two days before, had been transferred to Patriotic School, and was threatening to run away if I was not found right away!

Albert was furious when I arrived an hour later.

"I had fifty pounds, monsieur! They swiped them!"

He would get his money back, I assured him. Meanwhile, what did he want? Albert wanted English cigarettes, a smoker (yes, the way English gentlemen dress when they are not in uniform), whiskey to drink, and also, would I show him Buckingham Palace where the King and Queen lived and the Tower of London where German spies were shot?

I got him the smoker after considerable trouble and a number of explanatory interviews. I also had a lot of trouble dissuading Albert from wearing it morning, noon, and night. As to whiskey, one single, into which I had shot a goodly proportion of soda water, was enough: "Cat's urine!" was Albert's verdict.

Smoking in silence, three R.A.F. officers and a staff major sat listening to Albert, who, going round on his hands and knees on the spread-out large-scale maps of the East of France, was explaining, just as he would have explained to any of his pals, how he thought that this or that should be attacked and bombed. With a thick colored pencil which he had picked up on a desk, he was slashing and marking somebody's set of maps, but no one was complaining or even smiling.

"Look . . . Here you have the German anti-aircraft guns, there . . . and there . . . Now, if you arrive very low . . . this way"—and his hand simulated the plane flying low and banking round obstacles—"they can't get a shot at you, because all their guns are the wrong side of the slope . . . here! They're not so very bright, you know!"

What has become of Albert, I wonder? I know that later he went back to France and that he came through with flying colors and never

a scratch. But Albert must be getting on in life, now. Perhaps he has a son who occasionally goes dancing in a smoker which his father can no longer wear and which he lets him borrow.

Good luck, Albert, wherever you may be.

18

People seeking and sometimes even asking for particularly dangerous jobs were never welcome in our service. I think the only time I saw Colonel Gowen really angry was the day he suddenly burst out after listening to a man who had solemnly explained that, not only did he not fear death, but that if death wanted him, et cetera, et cetera. . . .

"You are fantastic, really," exploded Colonel Gowen, suddenly interrupting his visitor. "You simply come to us because you haven't guts enough to jump off Waterloo Bridge or sit under a bus when the driver is not looking! This is not a suicide club, so go and try something else elsewhere!"

Men with a sense of humor and a desire to live were, in any case, far more welcome than "sad sacks." A man who wants to live is really the only one who, in case of absolute necessity, knows how to die usefully.

But Corporal Flyn was not really a would-be suicide. At the beginning he had rather hoped that the girl who had jilted him back in Ireland might help him get what he wanted, but that was not really serious. No, what Flyn was after was danger for danger's sake; somehow he liked danger, much as a dog likes a bone or as some men like a double whiskey, or chorus girls, or something. Of Irish parents but born in London and vaguely ashamed of his cockney accent, Flyn was one of those curious beings who simply do not understand what fear is or what it means and, as is often the case with really fearless people, they like danger, and Flyn thought danger the very best of fun, really.

Flyn did not know any foreign language. Laughing at anything but

ever ready to cry over any heartbreak story, be it only a song, he did not seem particularly intelligent. His name had, however, been indexed because of two things: his total lack of fear and his surprising intuitive knowledge of electricity and things electric. For instance, Flyn could always tell whether a wire was live or not; he had a sort of sixth sense for things like that. Though he had never been taught he could repair any electric motor, big or small; he would look at it, listen to it, shake it, talk to it, and make it work again. If he did take it to pieces he never unscrewed the wrong screw or the wrong part.

"Where is Corporal Flyn?"

"Leave him alone. He's talking the lift into behaving itself."

"There's a colonel wants him."

But Colonel Gowen, who had heard, was already making his way toward the lift.

"Hello, do you recognize me?"

"Yes, sir."

"I think I have something that might interest you."

"Really, sir? Wonderful, thank you, sir."

Grinning under a tousled crop of bright red hair, his hands and face black with grease, Corporal Flyn crawled out from under the lift.

Twenty minutes later, spick and span, standing at ease by his kit, his rifle, and his greatcoat, he was waiting for Colonel Gowen, who had given him half an hour in which to get ready to leave.

"No, come and sit in the back with me, please," he said when Flyn having piled his kit in the bottom of the car, was about to sit by the driver, a rather pretty girl.

"What did you say your trade was before the war?" asked the colonel as the car swerved out of the factory onto the London road.

"I forget, sir. I was so many things at different times: milkman, bus conductor, cobbler . . ."

"That's right, cobbler. We are going to a cobbler's now, where I am going to give you a pair of boots to mend."

"Your boots, sir?"

"Yes, any objection?"

"No, sir. I'll do my best."

"Fine," said the colonel, offering him a cigarette.

Two months later an old cobbler of Lille had a new assistant, Wladimir Flinsk, a deaf-mute Pole. It was a dirty little shop on the outskirts of the town, but full of shoes, piles of them from floor to ceiling, because with or without ration tickets the old cobbler always seemed to have real leather with which to repair shoes. His new assistant was a good fast worker, always nodding and grinning silently under his great mop of red hair, but he had one serious fault: he often arrived late in the morning, and on those days he gaped continually and would even go to sleep over his work.

"What if he does get drunk now and again? I am not going to fire him just for that. It is about the only fun the poor devil can enjoy, anyway," would explain the old cobbler to customers whose shoes were not ready on time.

The truth was that Wladimir often passed whole nights at quite another sort of occupation.

Every evening at seven o'clock he would take down his old gunmetal watch from the hook on the wall in front of him, spit out the mouthful of nails which he chewed as he worked, get up, and take off his big black apron, which he hung where his watch had been. Having slipped the watch into his waistcoat pocket, he would struggle into an old sports checkered vest that made him look like a clown until the moment when he pushed his flaming red hair into a small gray cap. After nodding and shaking his boss's hand he would walk out.

Wladimir did have one passion which his employer apparently knew nothing about; he loved a game of billiards. Every evening after work he invariably went to the same café for his *apéritif* and a game. The waiters knew him well, and as soon as he walked quietly through to the billiard room at the back one of them would order his *apéritif* and put it down on the table by the marking board, often before he had even had time to take off his coat, which he always put on the same hook, roll up his sleeves, and carefully choose and chalk a cue. Since Wladimir was a regular customer the days on which the sale of alcoholic drinks was forbidden, his *apéritif* was served in a cup instead of a glass. His usual partners generally arrived a little later; he liked playing with them, and whenever he won—which was quite often—he slapped them heartily on the back and left them to pay for his

apéritif. If he lost he would solemnly go to the marking board, chalk up the words: *Revanche demain*, pay for all the drinks, put on his old vest, and walk out.

Outside he would search his pockets for a cigarette; if he found one in the left side pocket of his vest he would stick it behind his ear and go straight to his room, a very small room—in fact, almost a garret—which he occupied on the seventh floor of a nearby house. Having lighted the small stove that was to warm the room and a saucepan full of soup, he would carefully tear open the cigarette he had found in his pocket, extract the fine piece of tissue paper inside it, and read his instructions for the night. One night the police had raided the café just as he was leaving. Wladimir had quietly lit and smoked the cigarette he had found in the usual place, and since all his papers were in order and his employer had come to the central police station to vouch for him, he had been released shortly after.

On the days when he found no cigarette in his vest he usually went to the pictures before going to bed. But when there was one he would rapidly eat his warmed-up soup, fix his garret window so that it could be opened by a push from outside, and, leaving his light on, he would go softly out onto the landing where on top of a beam he would find the key of the door next to his. The room next to his was really a neat little workshop, on the bench of which he would find his task for the night; a radio transmitter to be repaired, a miniature microphone to be inserted in a lampstand, or a telephone instrument to be wired in a special way, or some sort of similar work.

Had anyone found the key and opened that door during the day, the workshop and all its contents would have been blown to smithereens by two bombs specially primed to explode unless the door was opened in a very particular way. And during the night, should anyone have knocked at Wladimir's door, in a very short time, having reentered his room by the roof, he would have come to open the door, probably the worse for drink. True, that whoever had knocked at his door would have had to knock hard, because, being deaf, Wladimir could only feel vibrations. He was, however, never suspected and never had to use any of these stratagems.

Wladimir Flinsk led such an exemplary life that Corporal Flyn was beginning to get fed up with it, so much so that, "to have a little fun

and pass the time of day," as he explained later, he blew up the local German headquarters. Of course knowing full well that it would most likely not have been granted, he did not ask for permission to do so. This is how it happened.

Every night, on his way to the café where he played billiards, he passed in front of the local military headquarters and, next door, an officers' mess—a requisitioned restaurant—where quite a few elderly German officers were to be seen gathered round a long table at mealtimes. On two consecutive nights Wladimir Flinsk passed by the restaurant just as one of the officers got up to turn on the light before even the blackout shutters had been put up, and that gave Corporal Flyn his great idea. It would be really funny, thought Corporal Flyn, if that great white globe over the center of the table should be full of plastic and if it should go off with a glorious bang instead of lighting up when one of the officers touched the light switch.

A few mornings later, dressed in blue overalls and carrying a folding ladder, a pail full of sponges, and rags, a man stopped in front of the restaurant, within ten feet of the sentry by the door, and started cleaning the windows. Having cleaned them outside, he cleaned them inside and then went on to clean the great mirror over the mantelpiece, after which he carefully took down the electric globes. These he cleaned carefully with a damp sponge, and before putting them back he rubbed and polished the brass fittings that supported them. The sentry saw him come out, wash his sponges and rags and rinse out his pail at the fountain by the edge of the pavement, light the stub of a cigarette which had been stuck behind his ear under a lock of fiery red hair, shoulder his ladder, pick up his pail, and walk quietly off.

Wladimir was very late for work that morning, but, as usual, he simply grinned at the angry words of his employer, who finally shrugged his shoulders and let him get on with his work. Also as usual, the fact that he had been very late in the morning—over an hour—did not prevent Wladimir from putting down his tools and spitting out a mouthful of nails at five to seven. That night at seven sharp he smilingly shook hands with his boss and walked out of the shop. But for the first time in many weeks Wladimir turned left instead of right when he reached the corner of the avenue and went another way round to his favorite café.

A resounding bang made people jump just as Wladimir opened the door of the café. In the street behind him a German soldier started running, and, afraid, people began closing doors and shutters. Being deaf, Wladimir had not heard anything and walked calmly through into the billiard room. But there was a most unusual grin across his face as he selected a cue and began chalking it methodically.

19

It had been one of those interminable, nerve-racking operations where, although everything turns out well, one is continually under the impression that something is sure to go wrong, that this time it is not merely a routine job with its normal dangers but that Luck is on the point of turning and of handing things over to its grim-faced sister, Fate.

For three nights running we had got as far as the airfield. On the third night we had even got as far as climbing aboard the bomber that was to drop us, before the whole operation was again canceled. On the fourth night, which was to be our last chance before the next moon, we had taken off over an hour late as the tail end of a thunderstorm drenched the whole countryside, and no sooner were we over the Channel than we had to start dodging other thunderstorms. We had at last reached the rendezvous and had had to circle round for over twenty minutes before the "Reception Committee" at last showed the all-clear lights from the ground. We later discovered that they had given up seeing us that night and were on their way home when our roaring plane had made them run back to the dropping field.

I had been second to jump, and my parachute had savagely twisted above me. For a second or two, as I fell past the man who had dropped first, I thought it was all over, and I had shouted madly, as I used to shout in my nightmares when a little boy. My harness suddenly cut into my legs and shoulders as the chute at last opened, and a bare second later I hit the ground and rolled over, surprised and glad to be still alive.

Never had I seen such a powerful moon, giving the sort of moonlight one sees in films or on posters advertising luxury cruises. The members of the "Reception Committee" were running all over the place, waving and shouting and thoroughly enjoying themselves.

Dragging my parachute under some trees, I started filling my pipe.

"You are not going to light that pipe?" asked Songer, who had jumped immediately after me and yet had already made a neat bundle of his parachute.

"My dear fellow, anyone looking our way could see us over a mile away in this moonlight, and what with the noise the reception boys are making we can probably be heard three miles away. So I don't suppose that the glow of my pipe is likely to lead to our being discovered."

"Perhaps not, but you are not going to light that pipe."

He caught me by the wrist as I took my lighter out of my pocket and rolled me neatly over into a thorny bush. Songer was not a brutal man, far from it; he was not a coward either—as a matter of fact, he is one of the bravest men I know. He was ever ready to run the most fearful risks, and he often did, but he never ran a useless risk, no matter how small or unimportant, and my lighter could, I suppose, have been considered a risk.

Being pushed over in a thorny bush is never agreeable, and for a second or two I saw red. Perfectly calm, Songer held me down in this uncomfortable position until I became more reasonable, after which he helped me get up. We never again mentioned this incident, but he was quite right.

It is owing to that continual care for small details that Songer was never caught or even suspected during any one of his numerous trips to France. Of course coming dozens of times the way Songer came, did in the end reach the ears of the Gestapo. The Germans even got as far as discovering Songer's real identity, and he knew of it, because there were very few things the Germans got to know which we, in turn, did not sooner or later learn about. When told this, Songer grinned, although, being an Israelite, he ran—had he been caught—risks that make me shudder even today; he simply went on going to France every time his presence there was necessary. He went to Paris, in the occupied zone, without any real fear, and on one or two occasions,

when on the point of returning to England, he sent the Gestapo a post-card to say how sorry he was to leave them.

In his forties, small, with bright black eyes ever full of mischief, Songer looked a good deal younger. The fatigues and sleepless nights that such work entails had little or no effect on his iron constitution, and though ever on the alert he never suffered from the fear and anguish that grows and becomes intolerable for a man behind the enemy lines, which can unnerve him to the point where he dare no longer make a telephone call or go to a rendezvous, where he will jump if a child starts running in front of him, and where he even finds himself making detours to avoid walking past a policeman. In such cases, in order to avoid a complete nervous breakdown, the best was to get away in the country for a day or two or longer if necessary; but there were cases for which the only possible cure was getting back to England. Also, Songer never suffered from that strange feeling of elation, of overoptimism and cocksureness which can be far more dangerous than fear, because one is then tempted to do useless and silly things, "just for the hell of it," as I once heard one of our men say.

Without hurrying and yet never losing a moment, Songer always did precisely the right thing in a difficult situation. He had several times found himself in tight and even dangerous corners, and once even he had been obliged to kill a man. It happened one evening along the line of demarcation between occupied and unoccupied France, a few miles south of Orthez, in the foothills of the Pyrenees.

Songer was about to cross into unoccupied France, and he was a bare quarter of a mile from it when the German police dogs got wind of him and started baying. Getting rid of them with his little reserve of aniseed did not take him very long, but luck seemed to be against him that day; just as he turned the corner of a narrow and muddy path he found himself face to face with the first man of a German patrol.

"Papers!" said the sergeant as his men stood grinning round the swarthy little Gascon they had so easily caught.

He pulled out a filthy and half-torn identity card and showed them by gesture that he had crossed over from unoccupied France. In the little black bag slung over his shoulder he showed them the butter, the eggs, and the sausages he was carrying.

"Prison," said the sergeant simply, after recalling the dogs which

sniffed and backed away from the unpleasant odor that pervaded the prisoner's trouser legs.

He explained to the men of his patrol that these hardy little peasants cared little about a fortnight's imprisonment, the habitual punishment for crossing the demarcation line without a proper permit. The prisons were so full anyway that they had to be given tickets and ordered to come back later to purge their sentence. He was half a mind to let him go, he explained, but, after all, the lieutenant might as well see him.

They brought him back to the little house by a level crossing where their small command post had been installed. Picking up the telephone after vigorously turning a small black handle, the sergeant at last reported his catch to a high-pitched voice that made the earphone squeak . . . No, the Lieutenant was not going to leave his half-finished dinner for a peasant! . . . Oh yes, it would be quite easy to keep him there for an hour or two.

Quite unconcerned, the little peasant had pulled a sausage and a loaf out of his bag and, having thrown the end of his sausage to the dogs, which promptly gobbled it up, with his big clasp knife he cut a slice or two which he offered to the soldiers watching him.

"Carry on with the patrol," said the sergeant. "I shall stay here with him until the lieutenant comes back."

Taking no apparent notice of what was being said, the little peasant went on eating. Every now and again he raised his goatskin gourd, threw back his head, and squirted a fine jet of bluish-black wine straight down his open throat. Wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he offered it to the sergeant, who tried in vain to drink in the same manner. Both men laughed, and they finished the sausage between them, after which the sergeant produced a bar of Swiss milk chocolate which they also shared.

His dirty old beret pushed back onto his neck, carelessly rolling a cigarette, Songer was thinking. He would not even get past a first search. Unless the German officer was an idiot, he would want to know why a peasant was carrying the railway timetables for the west and southwest regions of France. Also, he or another would sooner or later notice the pencil marks all over the timetables; after that, once in the hands of the experts, it would soon be all up. Trying to

get rid of them in front of the sergeant was out. No one in the patrol had thought of searching him, simply because he had himself shown them the contents of his bag, but of course the officer would make him turn it all out. No, he must be out and away before the officer's arrival.

Songer then thought of the "Shanghai Buster." What would he have done in such a fix, he wondered? Turn the table over on the German facing him, for a start, no doubt . . . and then what? He looked big and strong. He would shout? That had probably very little importance, since it looked as if there were no other soldiers or buildings in the vicinity. But the Boche would soon get up. Would he have time to prevent him from getting up? Would he be able to put him out of action? How?

All these thoughts were racing through Songer's mind as he licked his cigarette. No, the German must not be allowed to get up from under the table. Therefore, after having upset everything he would have to resist the temptation of the open door; somehow he would first have to put that man out of action. How? He would have to act according to the way in which he would fall under the table, which way he would try to turn or get up.

Songer cast a last glance round him as he squeezed the end of his cigarette and put it in his mouth. Taking a long sulphur match out of his trouser pocket, he leaned forward over the corner of the table in order to scrape the match on the tiled floor. His legs folded back under his stool, he was about to slip his shoulder under the edge of the table to push it over, when the sergeant undid the clasp of his belt and put it on the table. Quietly he drew his pistol from the holster and, after it, rags and oil.

Songer knew the pistol well. The safety catch was on, but it was impossible to tell whether it had a shell in the chamber or not. Since the sergeant had been out on patrol the chances were that it was fully armed. In that case, once the safety catch had been raised, it could be fired; otherwise, it would mean an extra second for arming it.

Looking at the pistol with a silly grin, the little peasant was back in Scotland, learning to grasp and fire a pistol in less than a second. He would have to use both hands. As it lay on the table, the pistol was pointing his way. Like a chess player calculating and working out

the coming moves, Songer was mentally rehearsing each movement of each of his hands. He would have to grasp the barrel with his left hand, and at the same time his right hand would have to come down outspread in order to get hold of the butt properly, with the second finger—never the forefinger, which remains flat along the pistol and helps to point—ready to slip under the trigger guard and to squeeze. He felt that if he managed it like that, without loss of time, even if the pistol were not armed, he would still have time to step back and arm it with a flick of his left hand before the German could reach over the table to grab it.

Having rehearsed it once more in his mind, Songer bent down to light another match, for his cigarette that had gone out. Having sucked at it until he drew smoke, with a great wave of his hand to put out the match he upset his gourd on the edge of the table. Instinctively the German bent down to catch it. He had not even seen the peasant's hands, fingers outspread, coming down hawklike over the pistol.

As he fired Songer saw the look of surprise in the sergeant's face. His mouth opened, but instead of a shout blood streamed out of his nose.

Songer ran, ran as he had never run before. When at last he dropped, panting, into a ditch a good mile inside the unoccupied zone he found he was still holding the pistol. He shuddered a little as he forced it into the soft muddy bottom of the ditch.

It was the first time he had killed a man.

20

A few years after the war I happened to enter a shop in a street just off the Grands Boulevards in Paris, to buy my son a pair of skates. Behind the counter, affable and smiling, stood a man whose face I knew, and by the way he looked at me, I felt that he also had recognized me.

"Excuse me," I said, "but I know you, and just now I had the impression that you knew me. Where and when did we meet, have you any idea?"

No, he was sorry, he did not remember ever having met me; and I felt foolish and annoyed, because I knew the man was lying. He called his wife and asked her if she had ever seen me before, and I felt still more annoyed at this evident effort to distract my attention. No, she had never seen me, but they had at one time had a shop in Bordeaux. Perhaps had I been—— No? Well, then, she really did not know.

As usual in such cases, all sorts of names sprang to my mind, but none fitted. Had they ever been to Font-Romeu or Cauterets, in the Pyrenees? No, they had never been farther south than Arcachon.

Leaning down, he opened a drawer, and I could have sworn that I had seen that man before, in exactly the same position. But where, when?

Two days later I nearly stumbled over a man bending down to tie up his shoelace, and in a flash it all came back. A white handkerchief sticking out of the shopkeeper's hip pocket had attracted my attention when he had bent down, but now I knew; when I had seen him in the same position ten years before, instead of a handkerchief I had

seen a Luger. And now I also knew why, when seeing him again, I had been reminded of Font-Romeu and Cauterets; it was simply that, when talking to that man the first time, I had thought of those two places in the Pyrenees, two places which I knew well and where I thought I might have a chance of crossing over into Spain, should I manage to escape, for I had that day been arrested.

It had happened in Châteauroux where, not knowing that he had been arrested the week before, I had come to meet my radio operator.

In the train from Pau I had recognized one of the men I had seen in one of our special training schools in Scotland. He merely smiled as we passed each other in the corridor, but we did not speak. He got off the train just ahead of me at Châteauroux, and I thought that he probably had the same radio operator. On passing the ticket collector, I noticed that two men who had been standing among the people waiting for travelers were now following my "school friend," and I shuddered at the thought that others in the waiting crowd were perhaps going to follow me. After fighting down a desire to start running I thought that I must somehow warn the man who was being followed. Whatever he was doing in France was evidently none of my business, but it was only fair that I should help him if I could.

Running after him would of course be idiotic; the men who were following him would immediately guess that I had spotted them, and my action might simply result in our both getting arrested on the spot. He was walking along the Avenue de la Gare, toward the center of the town, and the two men were following him on the opposite pavement, some fifty yards behind. My only hope was to head him off, try to get ahead of him, and attract his attention without being noticed by the men shadowing him.

This was my first visit to Châteauroux, but as always, whenever I had to go to a place I did not know, I had spent a good hour studying a map of the town, and for once this precaution was going to prove very useful. I knew that, parallel to the Avenue de la Gare, the Rue de la Poste also led toward the center. I would have to take a chance on my friend stopping somewhere along the avenue or turning off it before reaching the other end, but I had no time to think out a better plan, and, running into a café opposite the station, I dumped

my little suitcase behind the counter, gave the barman ten francs, and asked him to keep it for me for a few minutes.

There were very few people in the Rue de la Poste, and none of them paid any attention as I ran by. A little out of breath, I turned right at the end, and when at last I reached the Avenue de la Gare I was delighted to see that so far everything had gone according to plan; my friend was not a hundred yards away, walking quietly toward me. I stopped by a bookshop and waited for him to reach my level, hoping that, seeing me, he would realize that there must be some reason for my having headed him off.

When he looked at me, I deliberately turned and looked into the window of the bookshop. Out of the corner of my eye I saw him hesitate a fraction of a second, then enter the shop to buy a paper. I walked in behind him after a glance at the two men still trailing him but too far to see us talking in the shop.

"You are being followed by two men," I murmured over his shoulder.

"Thank you," he said as the man behind the counter gave him his change, and, smiling at me, he walked out.

All that day I felt uneasy. Outside the modest little lodginghouse close to the church, where a room had been reserved for me, I made sure that no one was hanging around or watching. There was no one in the small lobby, and the old lady who gave me my key did not seem at all disturbed. For a long time I stood waiting behind the curtains, watching the narrow street, but no one appeared. Having changed my felt hat for a beret and discarding my raincoat, I at last walked out, a different man.

There was no one at the end of the street or, come to that, near the church. I soon found myself in the main street where I went leisurely from shop to shop, looking at all the windows and making sure that I was not being followed. Convinced at last that all was well, I made my way toward the military barracks on the outskirts of the town. I found them quite easily and walked up the cobbled side street where, on the left, was the military hospital and, opposite, the garage where I should be able to contact my radio operator.

The garage was closed. I knew that, in that case, I only had to scribble a note and drop it into the letter box of the house next door,

where the garage owner lived. The street was quite empty, but rather than risk being seen writing a note there I walked on to a large boulevard where I found a seat on which to write my message. I walked back past the garage, which was still closed, and pushed my note into the letter box next door. As I turned to leave, a bareheaded civilian came to the door of the military hospital on the other side of the street and watched me walk away. A civilian in a military hospital seemed strange, and again I took every precaution in making my way back to my lodgings, but I was not followed.

Next day was warm and sunny, and I felt much brighter. The fact that my colleague had been followed had rather upset me. Wondering what had become of him and whether he had managed to shake off the men on his trail, I made my way to the Café-Hôtel du Faisan, where I was to meet René, my radio operator, at noon.

As agreed and so that he would know me, I ordered a half bottle of Vichy and settled down to solve the crossword puzzle in the local morning paper.

It was well past midday when a square-shouldered, smiling, fair-haired man came up to my table.

"Are you Monsieur Touché?"

"Yes."

"Excuse me, I am a little late. Would you please come outside? We cannot talk here."

"Certainly. Just a second while I pay for my drink."

"That's all right. It is paid."

I knew that I was caught and was therefore not surprised when two other men got up from a nearby table to escort us out of the café. They led me toward a black Citroën car, and, although I was not able to destroy it, I managed to crumple the only compromising document I had on me and drop it in the gutter as I bent down to get into the car.

Not nearly as anxious as I had supposed I might be in such a situation, I was driven to the police station where, after a rapid search of my pockets, the smiling policemen proposed that we should all have lunch together in a nearby restaurant. I began to feel quite relieved.

However, before the day was over I was to discover that the Vichy police had methods and ways quite as refined and just as painful as the best Gestapo methods.

The cell of the Périgueux prison into which I was finally bundled three days later seemed a heavenly refuge, and the jailer who locked me in seemed quite a nice man, even though he did punch me in the face because I had let blood in the courtyard where he had made me wait.

The smiling fair-haired man who sold me skates for my son was the inspector who had arrested me in Châteauroux. I bear him no grudge in spite of the two or three halfhearted kicks I received from him during the thirty-odd hours of my questioning.

In my prison cell I soon got acquainted with hunger and solitude. Solitude, even that of a prison, is not unbearable, but hunger, real hunger, is most unpleasant. In a very few weeks I lost over forty pounds. My jailer came three times a day: in the morning with a mug of hot water which he assured me was coffee, at noon with a slightly larger mug of so-called soup in which floated three or four beans—the most I ever counted was ten—and at night another mug of soup and a lump of dark brown bread the size of my fist. Once a week, on Wednesdays, there was a small piece of meat—sometimes only a bone—in the soup. I soon got to prefer a bone, because, chewing it slowly like a dog, I could make it last most of the day. When it was too hard to break with my teeth I would wedge it in the door of my cell, and when the jailer came round with the next meal, as he pushed the door the bone would be crushed. After his departure I only had to pick up the pieces and get on with my eating.

One mug of cold water was all I had for drinking each day. At first I tried to drink a little and wash as best I could with the rest, but I soon gave that up, because thirst is even more unpleasant than hunger.

For weeks, therefore, I did not wash or shave or even comb my hair. I tried at first with a nail, but the amount of work put in for such poor results was quite disheartening, and I gave it up. Of course I was miserable, feeling so dirty, but after a while I realized that this was a sort of complex, that I was not really miserable because of my state of filth but that, on the contrary and to be quite honest, there was a certain animal satisfaction about it.

The weakness due to hunger is not in itself unpleasant and would be quite bearable, were it not for the numb, continual pain that goes with it. Feeling not unlike a Buddha, I was beginning to have a vague

notion of what a life of contemplation might be like, but instead of contemplating my navel sunk in fat, I contemplated my bones which were daily showing more and more under my skin.

For hours at a time I could remain motionless on the long bag of straw which was officially called a bed, enjoying a wonderful and total lucidity of mind. Now I could understand why confinement, or at least real solitude, is really essential for those who wish to lead a life of contemplation. Purely abstract thoughts gradually became a strange and very satisfying sort of pleasure, and for the first time in my life I felt really free. I reached a point of semioriental satisfaction where I could lie back and dream of time in space without the interference of any other sort of desire, not even that of hunger which had become purely physical, in that I could by sheer will forget about it. How can one dream of time in space? I really do not know, except that I had to go through a number of thought transitions before reaching the time-and-space trance. One of my favorite thought transitions was that of the prow, always black, of some mysterious ship softly cleaving its way through an endless, very bright, blue sky.

Obeying the ancestral laws of survival, and in order not to burn up its reserves uselessly, my body had become numb and torpid, and I was able to sleep like a baby for as many as eighteen hours a day.

21

This period of abandonment and total resignation only lasted a few weeks. Even in solitary confinement a prisoner is never really quite isolated from everything. He slowly becomes aware of life going on round him. He gets to know the meaning of every little sound that reaches his ears. Thus, I gradually became aware of other prisoners living each side of me, above me, and below me; I could hear the doors of their cells opening and shutting at mealtimes; I began to be able to distinguish the footsteps of various jailers. The outside world also began to interest me, and I got to know the meaning of different sounds.

Never having been in prison before, it was quite some time before I discovered that the great pastime of nearly all prisoners is communicating with their neighbors. The transmission of messages from one end of a prison to another had made considerable progress during the Second World War. Unfortunately, being in an old-fashioned, thick stone-walled prison, we had not the advantage of heating or water pipes for whispering or tapping messages. I first noticed that messages were exchanged when one night I heard two prisoners shouting questions and answers in a mixture of Spanish and French which they probably considered an adequate enough code. Of course, as was to be expected, jailers soon put an end to it by simply going round and banging on cell doors.

This made me wonder if perchance there were others of my group in the same prison. I had thought a lot about my arrest, and though I had not been told I could well imagine that, having discovered our

"letter box," the police had arrested others. The problem was, therefore, to find out if there were others like me in the same prison and, if so, some way of communicating with them. I had noticed that I never received my soup in the same mug and, since my jailer left it with me until the next meal, when I had to return it empty for a full one, I supposed that the mugs probably went haphazard from one prisoner to another. It was most annoying to feel that the very mug I was drinking out of had quite possibly been in the hands of another Englishman that morning or the night before. Of course sticking a message underneath was hopeless; the mugs were probably washed, and any such message would be washed away or discovered. And in a flash I found the easy, the obvious solution, so obvious that the chances were no one would ever see my message, but I would try.

With a nail which I had extracted without too much difficulty from one of the walls I started carefully scratching a Morse message round my mug, just under the rim. For three days I did this on every mug that came into my hands. Since my messages were in Morse and in English there was not much risk of their being deciphered by prisoners they were not intended for. If there was another Englishman somewhere in the building sooner or later he would get one of my mugs; whether or not he would notice my message scratched very lightly—so that only people raising the mugs to their lips would be likely to spot it—was another question altogether, a probability I preferred not to think about.

A week later I felt my heart miss a beat when my jailer handed me a mug, round the edge of which I could distinguish some scratches. On examining it as soon as he had closed the door, I saw that it was only one of mine that had come back my way. A few days later, however, I had the joy of deciphering quite a long message giving me numerous and interesting details about the prison and its inmates. However, the message was not signed, and the author gave no information whatsoever about himself or any other English prisoners.

Then one night I entered into the tapping circuit. The code is quite simple: one tap for A, two for B, three for C, and so forth. It is a long and fastidious business even though, after a while, one gets up quite a speed. I thus got to know the prison news, always interesting and sometimes sensational.

One day at last I heard a tentative "Who can hear me?" being tapped in Morse, and I started communicating with a prisoner on the floor below mine.

We soon became excellent friends though we never questioned each other concerning our identities or the reasons which had brought us where we were. And since my friend was a chess player, making pieces and scratching chessboards on the floor of our cells was soon accomplished. My chessmen were made from pieces of straw pulled out of my bedding. My new friend, who in many ways seemed much better off, was able to draw and cut his pieces out of paper.

The only visits I had during those weeks of solitary confinement were those of a local lawyer who had been officially assigned to me. He was a quiet and rather hopeless little man, trying hard to do his best but very much afraid of what defending me might eventually mean for him. Of course I had nothing to tell him outside of my recriminations about the food and my enforced state of filth. There was of course no question of my being granted bail, but he had finally promised to ask the judge in charge of my case that an end should be put to my solitary confinement on the grounds that it was proving quite useless since, not only did I know all about the other prisoners, but I also knew what was going on in the outside world. I realized that in making such a statement I ran the risk of being watched with much greater care or even perhaps of being transferred to some other prison, but on the other hand the result might be appreciable if the judge happened to be an intelligent human being or, as I was given to understand, an absolute fool.

One afternoon, in the middle of a game of chess, I heard hurried footsteps along the corridor, and a moment later a French colonel stepped into my cell. He explained that I was a military prisoner and that he had come to inspect my cell. As a result of my lawyer's demand the judge had evidently put in a report, complaining about the scandalous way in which prisoners were allowed to talk to each other, or something of the sort. Here, I thought, was my chance of proving to the disgusted colonel how little solitary confinement really meant.

"You communicate with other prisoners?" he asked suddenly, after having examined me in silence for some time.

"Oui, mon Colonel."

"How?"

"Since I am a military prisoner, that is a military secret, *mon Colonel.*"

"Don't be a fool. You know that the jailers are going to be punished, for if you communicate with other prisoners it means that they are at fault . . . Perhaps not sufficiently severe."

"That would be most unfair. For instance, I know things which the other prisoners and even the jailers ignore."

"Such as?"

"Well now, let me see. Yes . . . Here is something which you can easily check up. This morning the Bordeaux train was twenty minutes late."

"Have you a watch?"

"No, but I can give you the exact time. It is twelve minutes past three, *mon Colonel.*"

"It is a quarter past," said the officer gruffly, glancing at his watch.

"Well, that is something else you can check when you get outside, *mon Colonel.* You will see that I am right and that your watch is three minutes fast."

The surprise on the jailer's face made me want to smile. Never having been in solitary confinement, he had no idea of the importance a prisoner attaches to sounds from the exterior. Though the prison was quite a distance from the railway station, I had, for instance, gradually become able to identify the different train conductors by the way in which they handled their locomotive whistles. My watch had of course been taken away from me, but a little knowledge of astronomy had helped me make a sundial out of the bars on the window of my cell and the shadows which they cast on the opposite wall. I had set my first marks by listening to the various Périgueux clocks that chimed the hour—I could hear seven and occasionally, when the weather was fine, an eighth somewhere east of the town. Later I got better time by setting my marks by the town-hall siren which was tested at noon sharp every Thursday and, finally, with much greater precision still by a zenith which I succeeded in obtaining with my one and only tool, the nail with which I combed and with which I had carved my chessboard.

"What are you doing there?"

"Playing chess, *mon Colonel.*"

"You play chess alone?"

"No. I am playing with the prisoner in cell 43 on the ground floor."

And since my partner had tapped his last move just before the door of my cell was opened I now pretended to listen and solemnly moved my opponent's rook.

"How do you know that the prisoner in cell 43 has moved his rook?" asked the colonel, bending over my game.

"He transmitted his move a second or two ago, while we were talking, *mon Colonel.*"

"I don't believe you."

"Why not go down to his cell? You will see that he, too, is playing chess and that his pieces are in the same position as mine. If you wish I shall only transmit my move when you get there."

"Take me down to cell 43," said the colonel to the bewildered jailer.

It would take them at least two minutes to reach my friend's cell; I had long since calculated such distances and the time it took to cover them. We were separated by four locked doors, each of which had to be opened and closed separately. They would have to cover eight paces to the end of the corridor, turn right and walk another nineteen paces to the locked door of the inner covered courtyard staircase, twenty-two steps down to the ground floor, another locked door, and almost as many paces along the ground-floor corridor to cell 43. There was nevertheless no time to lose, and I feverishly tapped the following message to my partner:

"Urgent. Visit. Carry on game but await visit before playing my move a2–a3. Tell visitor you are warned his visit. Great fun."

My partner, who immediately guessed what had happened, just had time to tap a rapid "O.K." as he heard footsteps along the corridor. Looking up into the eyes of the colonel examining him through the peephole, he smiled and said:

"Come in, please. I was expecting you."

"You were warned of my visit?" asked the colonel after the jailer had opened the door.

"Yes. My partner says you are interested in our game of chess. Do you play? Oh, excuse me a moment, please. Here comes his move."

After looking up at the ceiling for a short while, as though he could see me, he bent over his board and moved my rook's pawn.

"I don't know how you do it, but I must say you do it extremely well," said the colonel, walking out.

22

Standing by the door of my cell, ready to exchange my empty mug for a full one, I could hear the other doors being unlocked, opened, slammed, and locked again as the midday soup was being distributed. At last my door was opened.

"Here we are! Look, you have a new inmate. You will no longer be alone," said the jailer as a tall, thin, gaunt man with a straw mattress under his arm bowed slightly and stepped into my cell.

"Jacques Morisseau," he said, introducing himself, once the jailer had bolted the door on us. "Correct me if I am mistaken, but I understand that this is your doing. I can assure you that I had no wish of intruding on your privacy."

"I am delighted to have you. All I possess is of course at your disposal—for the time being it only amounts to this nail. But may I know how this can be 'my doing,' as you say?"

"You apparently complained of being alone. Since I also was alone, quite happy, and content to be alone *Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction* or, for all I know, Marshal Pétain himself decided that I should come and live with you."

"I know you," I said in English. "Do you know me? Where have we met before?"

"We never met, but I remember seeing you once or twice at Orchard Court."

Yes, I remembered now; however, that was no reason for talking carelessly. Monsieur Jacques Morisseau—his English was as good as mine—might easily have been a traitor, or a Vichy agent, or perhaps

even a German agent. He also was evidently on his guard, and we talked of everything under the sun except of our army experience and of the reasons that had brought us together in a cell of the prison of Périgueux.

For over a week we talked for long hours every day and often well into the night, and little by little each of us became certain that the other was indeed a bona fide British officer. Insignificant remarks, aimless questions, indirect references to army life, to people we both knew made us more and more confident. Kipling says somewhere that in order to really get to know each other well two men should camp together; he did not know that a week in the same cell is an even better way. We soon discovered each other's likes and dislikes in literature, art, and food, food being ever uppermost in our minds. We talked of food, thought of food, and dreamed of food. Almost every night I had the same dream: a cupboard full of crockery which I cautiously opened: I knew that on a pile of plates in one corner were half a dozen slices of English bread and butter, all of which I ate with ravenous delight. That recurrent dream always appeased the numb pain of hunger for an hour or two, and when I awoke I always had the sensation that I had really eaten that bread and butter.

Hunger, I know, had different effects on others. One of our men who was in a cell not very far from ours one day finally received the paper and pencils he had been begging for for weeks. He promptly settled down and composed seven hundred and thirty different menus, two for each day of the year. He had made up his mind that, should he survive, he would one day put enough money aside to treat himself to a whole year of glorious eating. Another of our men, a radio operator, was very nearly driven mad with hunger, and for over a year after his return to England he always carried a small attaché case wherever he went; it was full of biscuits and chocolate which he never touched but which he knew that he could eat, should he feel hungry.

Jacques Morisseau, whose real name was simply Jack Morris, was a refined, intellectual, witty, quiet, delightful man. Whereas other tougher and rougher men soon break down under solitary confinement, Jack Morris had a strange way of accepting and yet ignoring it all. He once tried to explain to me how he never thought about the bars or the locked door of his cell, how he never really saw the

jailer but simply thought of other things and other people. With his long, narrow, aristocratic hands and his pale tired smile he had the unmistakable air of sophisticated good breeding so essential to such an attitude.

One morning he quietly told me that he was at last convinced that I was not a stool pigeon. After that he told me all about himself and bit by bit all his story. Before the war he had been an insurance agent in Paris, and since he spoke French like a native, shortly after Dunkirk he had offered his services to the military authorities and finally been interviewed by Colonel Gowen at the War Office. He had refused point-blank being parachuted. He had had to go through the preparatory schools, but there also he had refused to share in any form of violent exercise and had only taken a very supercilious interest in the theoretical side of the teaching.

"Your brutish methods do not interest me," he had told Colonel Gowen during another interview. "You are not obliged to send me to France, but if you wish me to go please don't bother me with all those absurdities. If ever I get into trouble I shall find my own salvation and my own way out of them."

He must have said that in his cool calm way and quite indifferent as to the result.

As they did with all who refused to be parachuted he was shown practice jumps. He watched one stick of parachutists drop out of a bomber roaring above, but whereas the others round him eagerly watched the men until they touched the ground, he lay back in the grass, pulled his cap over his eyes, and went to sleep. They took him up, and he saw men jump. He smiled but politely refused to try.

Having won his point, Jack Morris had become Monsieur Jacques Morisseau, who, beautifully dressed, had one fine night carefully climbed out of a Lysander that had landed in a Dordogne field. His hat slightly tilted on one side, his raincoat neatly folded over his arm, and carrying a small suitcase, he had calmly walked as far as the next town, where he had got on a train going to Toulouse.

Although we suffered severely from hunger we got on very well together, and life soon became much more agreeable. Naturally, our thoughts and conversation, when not occupied by food and means of

obtaining more food, turned to possible means of escape. Had I any ideas?

"No. We must be patient. London knows where I am, and they will soon know that you are with me. They certainly will not let us rot here. We'll be getting some sort of news sooner or later."

"I suppose so, though I don't believe in waiting for them to storm the place with ladders and bows and arrows," commented Morris dryly.

He waited a whole week, a week during which he carefully examined and discussed with me every possibility we could think of.

"Impossible without outside help," he concluded as we both lay in the dark, one night, after the jailer's last round.

"That is why we must be patient," I said.

"But we are almost at the end of October, and I promised my wife that I would be home in London for Christmas. If my plan succeeds I will be."

"You have a new plan?"

"Yes, and I am going to start carrying it out tonight."

"Do you mean to say you are going to try to escape tonight?" I asked, turning over on my side and leaning on my elbow.

"No. But in about three weeks' time, a month at most, I should be free."

Getting up from his straw mattress, he went rummaging around in the dark.

"What are you looking for?"

"A piece of soap I was able to conceal."

"What on earth for? We haven't water enough to wash with."

"No, but we have enough to drink."

"What are you doing? Don't waste our drinking water!"

"Are you thirsty?"

"No."

"Are you likely to be thirsty before morning?"

"No."

"Then allow me to waste our water," said Morris, biting off a piece of soap and making it melt in our water, part of which he quickly drank off a few minutes later.

"Morris, you're mad! You'll make yourself frightfully ill, but it won't get you anywhere."

He went back to bed without a word. He was violently sick several times that night, and each time he drank a little more soapy water.

In less than a week he was vomiting blood. The prison doctor came round one morning to see him, listened to his explanations about the stomach ulcer he had had for some years, and made out a prescription. That afternoon the jailer handed Morris a large tin of medicine.

"Look, you're always hungry," said Morris. "You eat it. It's coated in sugar and can't do you any harm.

A few nights later, still drinking his soapy water at regular intervals, he started moaning aloud and vomiting violently.

"Morris, are you all right?" I whispered. "Was that just part of the show?"

"No. I think . . . I think I've had it," he said, breathing heavily and vomiting blood all over his bed.

Getting up, I put on my boots and started kicking the door, the only way I knew of attracting the jailers' attention. Sure enough, after a while I heard their footsteps, doors being unlocked, and at last two of them arrived with one of the prison dogs.

Frightened at the sight of the thick black blood and the now pitiful moaning of Morris, one of them dashed off to wake up the prison director, who finally came to look at my companion.

"All right," he said after glancing round the cell. "Don't touch him. We'll get the doctor round in the morning."

"It will be too late, and you know it," I said, stepping up to him. "You can't let that man die like a dog. You know full well that we are British officers, and you also know, or ought to know, that the Vichy authorities have every interest in keeping us alive."

"All right, then. I'll telephone the doctor, but that is all I can do."

He did, however, leave a light and one of the jailers with us.

Ten minutes later he was back to say that the prison doctor was away but that the local military hospital was sending an army doctor.

Much sooner than I had expected we again heard footsteps and keys, and a moment later a colonel of the Medical Corps stepped into our cell. He carefully examined Morris, who was no longer able to answer questions.

"What is the matter exactly, do you know?" he said, glancing up at the director, who had struggled into his Sunday uniform.

I told him about Morris's ulcers and showed him the tin of medicine which the doctor had prescribed.

"This man is a military prisoner, I understand?"

"*Oui, mon Colonel,*" said the director.

"Right. Get all his papers ready," said the doctor, preparing a syringe. "I'll be back in half an hour with an order for his removal."

"What are you going to do?" I asked boldly.

"Give him a little morphia to alleviate his pain and then take him to the military hospital of Limoges, where I shall operate on him right away."

"Operate on him for what?" asked the director.

"For a stomach ulcer which I would not wish on any man."

It was just daylight when two stretcher bearers came to fetch Morris. I had prepared a bundle of his few belongings and put it between his legs on the stretcher. He smiled weakly.

Again I found myself alone. A few days later one of the jailers told me that Morris had been operated on and seemed to be doing well. Then some ten or fifteen days later my chess-player friend informed me that Morris had escaped from the Limoges hospital. It was of course only much later that I heard the following details of his impossible escape, impossible at least from the medical standpoint.

Morris was still very weak on the seventh day after his operation. He felt terribly giddy whenever he tried to sit up, and he suffered a good deal, but he never complained. He was alone in a room at the end of a ward. The window over his bed was heavily barred, and the door of his room could be locked from the outside, but his state of weakness was such that that precaution was considered as quite unnecessary. Officially, a gendarme was supposed to be watching him day and night, but there again the gendarme assigned to this duty merely looked in once a day.

He never rang for the nurse, but had she come to his room late at night, she would have had the surprise of her life; she would have found Morris walking slowly, doggedly, round and round his room. He had been doing this for four nights now, and although he was still terribly weak he had decided that he would escape that night.

No one suspected that he was strong enough to walk, and the chances were that the night nurse would not look in before morning. Every night she brought him a drink of milk and mineral water and two sleeping tablets. Morris pretended to be asleep, knowing that she would not wake him up to give him his sleeping tablets.

Five minutes after she had quietly closed his door he got up, dressed with greater difficulty than he had expected, and, a little unsteady, walking very slowly, he had left the hospital by a side door.

Outside it was beginning to snow. He did not know Limoges nor even where the hospital was situated, but what he did know was that he would have to go a good twelve miles into the country before reaching the village where he knew he would find help. His bandage was terribly uncomfortable and his scar very painful; he would have to find a doctor, someone he could trust, to take out his stitches.

He passed by a café still open, hesitated, but finally decided against entering to ask his way. It was then that he noticed the bicycle by the edge of the pavement, as though waiting for him. Again Morris hesitated—he had never before taken anything belonging to another—then slowly, very slowly, he managed to get a leg over it and to sit on the saddle. In spite of the cold, beads of sweat were running down his face. Luck was with him, for without the slight downward slope of the road he would never have had enough strength to pedal away.

He turned into a long sweeping avenue, and the hill got steeper. He had no idea of the direction in which he was going, but the cold air rushing by did him good. He seemed to be moving away from the center of the town, and that, for the time being, was a good thing. He braked at last by a signpost and read: "Uzerche, 58 kilometers." He was on the wrong road; Uzerche, he knew, was to the southeast of Limoges, whereas he had to go east. He was about to follow the Uzerche road in spite of that, hoping to find a turning to the left farther along, when a policeman stepped out of the shadow of a railway bridge. Without thinking, Morris spoke first:

"Please, *Monsieur l'Agent*, the road for Bourganeuf?"

"It's that one over there. But don't cycle around like that without a light," said the policeman.

"Yes, of course. I'm sorry, I had forgotten to put it on. You know how it is when you get bad news."

For a long time he rested on the handlebars, fiddling with the catch of the dynamo on the front wheel. The policeman little knew that Morris was trying not to faint. At last, with a tremendous effort that shot a searing gut-twisting pain all along his scar, he pedaled slowly away on the Bourganeuf road.

The following evening Monsieur de V—— found a man lying full length in the snow in front of his door.

"The sun will rise all the same," managed to murmur the man before fainting. It was the password.

Morris came to in a large warm bed. At the other end of the low ceilinged room a big fire was crackling merrily, and sitting by it, next to a grandfather clock ticking quietly, a woman was sewing. The man who had dragged him into the house opened the door and saw that he was awake.

"Fine," he said, "you are safe now. Tonight I shall be taking you to friends in Toulouse, where you will be able to rest and recuperate your strength."

"I must have a doctor . . . My stitches . . ."

"The doctor has already been. He will be coming back a little later this evening. He wants to give you a little fresh blood . . . just a small transfusion before you leave."

Morris very nearly died on the road to Toulouse. Lying semiconscious under a heap of straw in the bottom of a truck, he suffered a thousand hells. Twice the men conveying him managed to find doctors to come and give him injections of morphia. In Toulouse all sorts of plans had been proposed for him to rest and recuperate sufficiently before crossing the Pyrenees. Obstinately, biting his lips, Morris had refused anything that meant any delay.

By car, at night, he had been taken a good way up the Pyrenees, but he had finally had to get out and walk. Twice he had fainted, and each time his guide had wanted to bring him back. Without wasting his breath for an answer, each time Morris had painfully scrambled to his feet and gone slowly forward. He climbed the last slope up to the Spanish frontier on his hands and knees. Blood was dripping from his bandages.

In a clinic in Barcelona, where his stitches had finally been taken

out, he had his eleventh blood transfusion. The Spanish doctors wanted to operate on him again, but he had stubbornly refused.

He was unconscious when the plane on which he had been embarked in Gibraltar landed early one morning in the South of England.

On Christmas Eve, still very weak, without asking anyone's permission, he left the army hospital where he had been operated on for the second time and went straight home to his wife to keep his promise of being there for Christmas.

Morris has since had to undergo other operations, and he can now only absorb liquid foods. He is back in his pre-war job, quiet and refined as ever, never talking of his war adventures.

23

Instead of having me brought to his office by two gendarmes, as was usual, the military judge in charge of my case came specially to the prison to question me. From this I gathered that I was considered either a most precious prisoner or an extremely dangerous one. I was informed of the magistrate's visit by my jailer, who that particular morning brought me a whole can of water and a piece of soap, so that I could wash, he explained, an honor which I indignantly declined.

At eleven o'clock he came to fetch me, and for the first time since my arrival three months before, I walked out of my cell. Feeling a little dazed, I followed my jailer, put my foot out to go down the stone staircase at the end of the corridor, and rolled down the whole flight—my legs were simply no longer used to an exercise of that sort, and lack of food had weakened me far more than I had thought.

We were lucky in having that particular judge—I say "we," for the same magistrate was, I knew, examining the other members of my group—we were lucky in that he was a most colossal fool. Messages received from other prisoners had, of course, warned me, but he far surpassed my expectations. At first I wondered whether he was not doing it on purpose, but I soon found that although he had a most impressive amount of information, not only about each of us, but also about people in charge back in London, he had the most fuddled mind it is possible to imagine outside of a lunatic asylum. To this day I cannot help feeling that his appointment to our particular case was a deliberate and friendly move on the part of someone well placed

in the Vichy government. The final result, however, was not as funny as might have been expected; among others, I was sentenced to death for something in which I had really had no hand. We had, however, by then had time to escape.

Solemn and severe, the judge told me that he was going to confront me with a number of people. I explained that that was quite useless, since I knew everyone in the prison. He did, nevertheless, have some of the prisoners shown in, and I heartily shook hands with one and all, even those I did not know. By messages tapped from wall to wall all this had been arranged in advance. Thus, one of the prisoners rushed up and kissed me on both cheeks.

"I gather that you know each other extremely well," said the judge.

"No, *Monsieur le Juge*, I have never seen this gentleman before, but he looks so much like my brother-in-law that I could not resist kissing him."

"I don't believe you. And you, what have you to say, you also kissed this man?"

"*Monsieur le Juge*, he looks so much like my sister-in-law that I simply——"

"Enough! Clerk, please note: In spite of the two men's embarrassed explanations, it is more than evident that they know each other."

And on it went like that for over two hours, with the poor man getting more and more mixed up and with the clerk trying to keep a sober face and grinning and winking at us whenever he had his back turned.

The only appreciable result was that he was finally convinced of the uselessness of keeping any of us in solitary confinement any longer, and one glorious morning I was taken down to the general prison where I was heartily greeted and congratulated by a dozen friends. The general prison consisted of a large dormitory on the first floor and a long room on the ground floor with a door opening onto a high walled yard, round which we were allowed to walk for one hour every morning and every afternoon. There were about fifty of us altogether, including some twenty "political" prisoners, to which category we belonged; the others were common or garden thieves and other minor criminals. Our own little group consisted of six Englishmen,

who of course all spoke French like natives, and seven or eight members of the French Resistance who had been working with us.

Among these was Pierre Bloch, a socialist member of Parliament, who had been arrested with his wife in Marseilles as they were accompanying two British agents to a rendezvous. Pierre Bloch was the first member of the French Resistance to receive arms by parachute. Ever smiling and witty, Pierre was the perpetual life and soul of our little group. Friendly with the jailers, haughty with the director of the prison, who always looked terribly ill at ease in his presence, Pierre Bloch strode around in a wonderful blue dressing gown as though the entire prison were part of his Paris apartment. Without any sort of preparation he could at a moment's notice get up and talk on any subject under the sun, and the less he knew about the subject, the longer the speech and the more eloquent he was. We always cheered him madly after each of his speeches, and that was what gave us the idea of passing the time of day by forming a parliament of our own. Naturally, Pierre Bloch was elected both Prime Minister and President of the Republic of Béleyme (Béleyme was the name of the Périgueux prison in which we were incarcerated). There was a Finance Minister and of course a National Bank. The next step was to have our own currency, the unit of which was the "Béleymas." Its value was based, not on gold, but on something just as precious: tobacco. Thus one cigarette was worth twenty Béleymas, and on that basis the Bank of Béleyme issued paper money. The other prisoners took all this so seriously that for the purpose of trading inside the prison they soon came to deposit cigarettes in exchange for paper money! Strangely enough, we never came across any forged notes, and that in spite of the fact that we had one or two inmates for whom it would have been child's play. Our money was never devaluated, for the simple reason that the Bank of Béleyme never issued more paper money than the corresponding stock of tobacco in its vaults, an old cardboard shoe box, which, also strangely enough, was never raided. The bank was opened from breakfast time to bedtime every day, Sundays included, and anyone could always trade in paper money for pipe tobacco or cigarettes.

Society includes the good and the bad, and although ours had a rather high percentage of bad we never had any trouble. An old ha-

bitué of the prison, a real man of the underworld who knew a good many other prisons in a number of countries, once told me that we, "*les Anglais*," were really something quite special, something apart, and he assured me that we would never run into any sort of difficulty with the "regulars."

On the day of my transfer downstairs, I noticed a small, sinister-looking little man reading in a corner. Completely bald, he had no shirt but wore over an undervest a gaily colored woolen garment usually worn by girls and called a bolero, which somehow made him look even more sinister. If anyone ever looked like a murderer he most certainly did.

"You have probably noticed that everyone inside this prison is innocent, completely and totally innocent," he explained to me a little later with a strange foreign accent. "Of course you, too, are innocent, yes? Well, monsieur, that being the case, I have the unique privilege of being the only guilty man inside these walls and probably the only guilty man in any prison in this country."

That was how I met one of the most charming and delightful men I know, now a well-known actor in France, Abel Frederick O'Brady. Hungarian by birth but of Irish descent, O'Brady joined the Foreign Legion at the outbreak of war and fought gallantly. O'Brady is quite a good poet, a novelist of some repute, a ballet dancer, a fine pianist, an all-round actor, and a member of the Puppet Guild, one of the very few capable of giving a first-class puppet show with his bare hands!

O'Brady had had the extraordinary ill luck of calling on friends in Marseilles a minute or two before the police arrived to arrest them and, with them, any other suspects.

"What is your name?" asked an inspector, pushing him against a wall and frisking him for arms.

"O'Brady . . . Abel, Frederick, O'Brady," he stammered, little dreaming that the one British secret agent they had not bagged was called Frederick.

"I see," said the inspector with a crafty smile. "And I suppose you speak English?"

"Yes, like a native," said O'Brady.

"And could you tell us what you do for a living?"

"I am a comedian."

"I don't doubt it," said the inspector, picking up the telephone, dialing a number, and announcing with a triumphant smile to someone at the other end that the search could be called off because he had just captured Frederick!

Later O'Brady tried in vain to prove that he was indeed a real comedian, but no one would listen to him, and he was dragged to Périgueux to join his "colleagues." He spent almost a year in jail before his lawyer was able to get a hearing from a court and to prove his client's innocence. Of course by the time he was released he had become one of us and worked for us afterward.

Périgueux was in the "free zone" of France, that part of the country which had not been occupied by the German troops when the 1940 armistice was signed. Now and then we had the doubtful pleasure of receiving among us some minor German agents which the police of the Vichy government had picked up with perhaps a little more relish than when arresting members of the resistance. Our jailers, two or three of whom were Alsatian, usually warned us of the arrival of such prisoners. Much to the delight of all, this generally gave rise to an "O'Brady fit" in honor of the newcomer.

As soon as the new inmate was let in O'Brady would start to act his part, a part which often lasted several hours. He would sit in a corner, perfectly still and gazing into space. Sooner or later the newcomer would notice this strange little man who neither moved nor spoke.

"It's a shame, a terrible shame, monsieur," would explain Pierre Bloch. "That poor man is mad, stark, raving mad, do you hear? He was brought here after having killed his wife, his mother, and his sister. Surely you must have read about it in the papers? . . . No? Strange, all the papers were full of it. It was terrible, monsieur, a frightful butchery. He killed all three the same evening—three horrible murders, monsieur! His mother and his wife he stabbed and stabbed, and stabbed again, and as they ran round screaming he fetched a hatchet from the cellar and chopped their heads right off! His poor sister arrived just as he was finishing the frightful task of cutting up his victims into little cubes, and—this is perhaps the worst of all, monsieur—he went for her like a wolf and tore out her throat! . . . Yes, monsieur, he bit her to death!"

"How awful. And now he looks so meek."

"Yes. Well, of course, you know, dangerous lunatics are always like that. He is the quietest, kindest man imaginable until he gets a fit. Then he remembers, and we have to live through the whole tragedy all over again."

"Does he often have such fits?"

"No. But we are very careful because the mere sight of a knife, or a bone in his food, can suddenly start him raving."

"What happens then?"

"That is what is so awful. We can only keep away from him as best we can. The prison doctor refused to have him certified, and when the poor man does have a fit he refuses to come and see for himself, because it does not happen to be during his visiting hours."

"Poor devil. Can't you do anything?"

"When he has a fit? But, monsieur, you do not understand, he is dangerous. With his bare hands he could kill quite easily! No, the only thing we can do is keep clear or, if he catches any of us, immediately lie down; that makes him think it is the corpse of one of his victims and he passes on."

Of course O'Brady always had a fit that night after supper. At the long table round which all the prisoners sat for their evening meal the newcomer was placed in front of him, and those in charge of ladling out the soup saw to it that a large bone was dropped into O'Brady's.

The fun usually started when the "poor lunatic" suddenly discovered the bone in his soup, which incident always cut the newcomer's appetite dead. O'Brady's face would suddenly harden as though carved out of oak; after a moment of perfect immobility his left eye would start twitching nervously, his mouth would slowly twist into something between a grin and a snarl, and little by little a thick white froth (produced with the aid of a small piece of soap) would begin to run down his chin. All talking would cease, and the prisoners sitting each side of him would slowly move away. Petrified, the newcomer would watch O'Brady look slowly right and left and, with a sudden fearful yell, grasp a pocket knife which someone was always careful to leave on the table near him. Staring straight at the newcomer, he would then say very gently:

"Papa . . . Oh, Papa, you are home. Come, like Mama . . . Like

MAMA!" And with a frightful shriek he would start running round and round the room, chasing all the prisoners in front of him.

"Call the jailers! Do something!" would scream the victim, who always found himself being pushed to the wrong side of the table.

The main reason why the jailers never came, in spite of the general uproar, was that they were usually killing themselves laughing, looking on at the fun through the spyhole of the refectory door.

On more than one occasion O'Brady trod all over the prostrate form of a newcomer pretending to be dead but fearful that his last minute had come, nevertheless. The fun usually ended when, stooping and about to stab his victim, O'Brady was finally rushed by one or two "courageous" men. After a fearful struggle, naturally all over the prostrate man, O'Brady would be disarmed and taken back to the table where he would sob that no one understood or loved him. He would end up by kissing the newcomer and sobbing in his neck: "Papa, papa, forgive me! I know I killed Mama, but you did not really love her, did you? You don't really mind? Tell me that you forgive me!"

All the prisoners were not thieves or criminals, but apart from cheap little traitors who were thoroughly despised by even the worst criminals, there was really no perceptible difference between culprits and innocents. Most of them were men in whom I would have had full confidence, from the fanatical communist who with only a penknife had carved out of firewood the three pieces of a perfect safety razor, to the young royalist who sat on the extreme right in our Béleyme Parliament, and including Gourvat, a Périgueux house painter and decorator who had somehow been found dabbling with official petrol and who later got into still more trouble because some of his ladders were invariably found near the prison walls whenever English prisoners escaped. As a matter of fact, Gourvat is still one of my best friends.

24

Under the cover of bridge tournaments, sittings of the Béleyme Parliament, and the fits of O'Brady we were preparing our escape. A contact had been established with London, and we knew that, slowly perhaps, but surely, outside help was being organized. However, we were not to escape from the prison of Béleyme in Périgueux.

I had just put the last touches to a very good imitation of a Colt automatic which I had carved out of a piece of wood with some old razor blades and which I had patiently polished with lead pencils for hours on end, giving it just the right metallic aspect, when, with hardly any warning, we were transferred to the prison camp of Mauzac, near Bergerac, a few miles south of Périgueux. Annoyed at having put in so much work on a pistol which I knew would never get through the search we were to undergo before our transfer, on the morning of our departure I made a present of it to one of our jailers, who could hardly believe his eyes but who promptly pocketed it and promised not to tell.

After the search, which had indeed been a thorough one, we were lined up for a final inspection, and the director of the prison came forward to bid us farewell and shake hands with us. Not one of us saw his outstretched hand, and when he finally came to me at the end of the line I said with my most engaging smile:

"I look forward to the pleasure of seeing you again someday, my dear monsieur, but when that time comes I promise you that I shall be properly dressed, that is, in uniform . . . and of course fully armed."

That promise I kept. In 1944, shortly after the liberation of Paris, I went back to Périgueux wearing the dirty battle dress in which I had landed on the Normandy beaches a few weeks earlier and with a Colt .45 in the holster (the present of an American friend) strapped to my leg. *La vengeance est un plat qui se mange froid*, say the French. It was, I must say, extremely satisfying to see the director of the prison of Béleyme, green with fear, scraping and bowing, rushing forward to open doors, trotting around after me as I visited the entire prison, trying hopelessly to look pleased and at his ease. What was particularly satisfying was to do as we had so often done when under his rule: look straight through him as if there were nothing to see, as though he simply did not exist.

After the prison of Béleyme, Mauzac seemed like paradise. The open air, the large barracks full of sunshine, the wash basins, everything seemed so marvelous after the dark, sordid, and damp stone refectory of Béleyme, its stinking corridors and cells, its recreation yards where the walls were so high that the sun could only splash a very small space of ground at best. True, there was the barbed-wire enclosure, but we could look through it at fields and trees, and a road with real live people on it, and, in the distance, at roof tops with smoke moving lazily up from the chimneys. It was like discovering poetry all over again. The civilian guards were much the same as the Béleyme jailers; some were currish and unpleasant, others more amiable, and a few, a very few, quite friendly.

Isolated in one of the barracks, our little group soon had the place quite spick and span and even decorated. We were allowed to go once a week to the shower baths in the middle of the camp, and official British Red Cross parcels were beginning to arrive for us. We were supposed to eat in a large refectory where the two thousand prisoners of the camp were gathered together at mealtimes, but we soon obtained permission to eat in our own barrack and later to prepare and cook our own food.

Madame Bloch, the wife of the deputy, who had been arrested with her husband but who had since been granted bail, not only looked after the washing and mending of our clothes, bringing us great baskets of food twice a week, but also took a hand in organizing our new plans of escape.

Inside the camp we were leading a very busy Jekyll-and-Hyde sort of life. Every morning for well over an hour Captain Michael Trotobas, an athletic professional-army man who was later to meet his end in a gun battle with the Gestapo in Lille, would lead us out between the barracks and put us through some fast physical-training drill, the idea being that we had to build up our strength again after months of starvation and total inaction in the prison of Béleyme and thus get physically fit for any sort of prolonged effort we might have to undergo during or after our escape. In the afternoons we played innumerable games of *pétanque* (bowls on rough, unprepared ground, as played in the South of France), which gave us all the opportunities we needed for a close study of the double fence of barbed wire surrounding the camp.

Every night after a final roll call and inspection we were locked in our barrack. Night after night we held interminable sing-songs in order to cover the noise Georges Béguet was making, filing away at a piece of iron. Béguet, who had been one of our radio operators and who was quite a good mechanic, was gradually shaping a key that would, we hoped, open and close the door of our barrack.

The local priest who came to the camp regularly soon made a point of visiting us. Getting on for seventy, jovial and active in spite of the fact that he was legless—he had lost them somewhere in Argonne in 1916—he could handle his wheel chair with amazing dexterity. He normally stopped just outside our barrack, because it was raised above the ground and the steps prevented him from riding in; but one fine morning in May he said he had heard about our interior decorations and that he would like to see them. Would we carry him in, chair and all? Once inside, he wheeled his chair to the center of the room and asked us to gather round him.

"I have a little present for you," he said. "But first post a sentry or two at the door and windows, just to make sure that no one is roaming near the barrack . . . Right . . . Now all you others gather round me . . . That is the idea! Now, one of you look under my cassock . . . where my legs should be if I still had any. There is a present for you."

"Great Scott! It's a piano!" whispered Georges when he saw the small suitcase.

"Yes. I was given to understand that you can get plenty of music

out of it. It has been nicely tuned. I don't know whether you will be able to use it or not, but hide it and of course forget how it got here."

It was a radio transmitter which had been parachuted recently, and in no time we had it hidden away in the roof of our barrack. Working at night, Georges was able to tap a line passing just under the edge of our roof and in no time had everything in working order. Within a week he had made contact with London. Our escape was now getting really organized, and by means of our transmitter we were able to communicate, via London, with the people outside who were getting everything ready. Of all our outside helpers, Gaby Bloch was the most active. We were finally told that all was ready for us but that we would have to make the necessary effort at getting out somehow. The guards had been carefully approached; one or two had seemed interested by a possible large bribe, but only one, an Alsatian, seemed a real patriot and ready to help.

We decided that we would take a chance at getting through the barbed-wire fences one night between rounds but that by careful planning risks should be reduced to an absolute minimum.

After having decided on the exact point where we proposed passing the first thing to do was to work out the safest itinerary from our barrack in the center of the camp. As much as possible it would have to be out of sight from the top of the miradors and in the shadows cast by the different barracks when the arc lamps were switched on at night. Teams of *pétanque* players were sent out every afternoon in order to select the best itinerary, calculate the angles of shade the lights would cast, choose hard ground where we would not leave telltale tracks, and measure distances so that times could be calculated to a split second.

We now had a key with which we could open and close the door of our barrack, which, however, was in the full glare of an arc lamp and visible from one of the miradors! Our windows were crisscrossed with barbed wire and fairly high above ground; tampering in advance with the wire might show, and, in any case, getting out that way would mean starting with a drop which, though short, might be dangerous. We finally hit on the idea of preparing a false door painted on sack cloth and which could be pinned up in a matter of seconds, once the real door had been opened. From one of the windows one of us would

keep an eye on the man in the mirador, and, whenever he was not looking our way, the next to go would simply slip under the corner of the fake canvas door and run some ten feet into the shadow of an opposite wall.

Neither our guards nor the other prisoners in the camp were to suspect that we were preparing anything unusual, and we were careful to keep up all our normal activities; we went on playing cards, reading (for we now had quite a few books), and holding stormy sittings of our Parliament. We even, one day, voted against the Government and obliged Prime Minister Pierre Bloch to resign, and through a clever speech Raymond, the royalist extremist, started a revolution, upset the Republic, and got himself crowned King of Béleyme. This monarchy did not, however, last very long, and a counterrevolution soon made us "free" men again.

By the way in which we all worked hard at decorating and improving everything in our barrack anyone might well have thought that we intended living there for the next fifty years. Right across one of the walls the Frenchmen of our group had painted a large tricolor ribbon round an inscription in big black letters reading: *"Les causes qui meurent sont celles pour lesquelles on ne sait plus mourir."*

Those of us who had been parachuted formed an association which we called the Companions of the Floating Silk. We had our own insignia and sang our own special march which O'Brady had composed for us. The artist who was in charge of preparing our fake canvas door had painted our insignia on one of the walls; army inspectors and other official visitors had no difficulty in understanding the meaning of the open parachute coming down in front of a large silver moon, but few of them seemed to grasp the meaning of our English motto which was simply: "Shit or bust."

It had been decided that not all of us would attempt to escape; our little group included members of the French Resistance who had been arrested in connection with other affairs. There was also O'Brady, who though arrested in Marseilles because of us was really innocent and who refused to come with us if only to prove his innocence. There was one of our group, however, who refused stubbornly. Old Père Fleuret, who was over sixty and the eldest in our barrack, was the owner of a small garage in Châteauroux and had acted as "letter box" for our radio operator. He had been one of the very first arrested and

was always worried about his wife and daughter. Sooner than leave the country and therefore his family, he had decided that he would not escape, but, fearing still further trouble if we escaped, he wanted us to drop our plans and even threatened to warn the camp guards if we ever tried anything. We had no intention of forcing him to come with us, and we could well understand his reasons for not wanting to, but of course giving up the whole scheme was impossible. We did not want to hurt the poor old man, so we decided that, if possible, he would be put to sleep.

I would see what I could get from the camp infirmary, which was in the charge of a young medical officer with whom I had become quite friendly. I had already successfully obtained from him serum for snake bites under the excuse that there might be some adders around the camp in summertime. The real reason was that after our escape we intended going into hiding in some of the countless grottoes to be found all over the Dordogne region but which are sometimes infested by adders. He had evidently not believed my tale and had probably guessed what we really wanted the serum for but had nevertheless given me quite a few doses and a syringe with which to inject them, without a word of comment. A few weeks later he called me into his little office and gave me a message for us, thus proving that he not only knew about our plans but that he could also be trusted. When I told him that we needed something to make old Fleuret sleep he grinned and said that he would first have to examine him.

"He is no longer a youngster, you know, and I would hate you to have an accident instead of a little harmless fun."

Under the pretense of a general check up on all the men in our barrack he later managed to listen to old Fleuret's heart. The next day he gave me a small phial of colorless liquid which, he said, would be tasteless in beer or coffee.

"Thank you very much, Doctor."

"Don't thank me. I'm thinking of taking a few days' rest, but I do not exactly know when. Would you be good enough to tell me when you think it might be a good time? You see, there are times when I would sooner be far away."

"Yes, I think I know what you mean. I'll think it over and let you

We were now quite ready. For weeks we had taken turns staying up at night to keep a careful watch on rounds and to note the time it took them to go from one spot to another inside or round the camp. Thus, we knew that even if they suddenly decided to do a second round without resting, we could count on fourteen minutes after their passage anywhere. We would of course have to run the risk of a second patrol, although we had never seen one. Patrols were not strictly timed, but there was an average of one every hour. The guards in the miradors were changed every four hours.

Although imprisoned we had, thanks to our radio transmitter, brought off one of the strangest destruction jobs in the history of war. We had discovered through the loose talk of one of our guards whose wife worked in Bergerac that the local arms factory had been reopened and was turning out shells and explosives for the Germans. This information was sent to London. By return a number of questions were asked, most of which were duly and quite unwittingly answered by the talkative guard. They concerned the exact location of the factory and the working hours.

One fine night shortly after, and much to our delight, we heard the bombers roaring over, and a few minutes later we saw the sky over Bergerac glow red as heavy explosions shook the ground and sent clouds of sparks into the night.

The next day we heard from the talkative guard that the raid had been a complete success and that the powder factory had been totally destroyed, which interesting information was of course passed on to London that very night.

We did see a radio-detecting car on the road just outside the camp a few evenings later at the moment when we were about to start transmitting.

Telling us not to worry, Georges, our "pianist," sent a very short explanatory message.

"They would never dream of finding a transmitter inside the camp; therefore, they will look everywhere else."

He was quite right; we later learned that a number of houses and farms in the immediate vicinity of the camp had been visited and searched by the police the next day.

25

A date had at last been fixed. It was to be on the night of July 15 to 16. So that there should be no apparent change in our habits, we decided that Bastille Day, on the fourteenth, should be duly celebrated.

In the morning Pierre Bloch presided at a last sitting of the Béleyme Parliament, followed by a grand parade at which he took the salute. As Minister of War, I led the march past in my grand uniform (paper hat, wooden sword, and gendarme's gaiters) on my beautiful Arab steed (the barrack broom). This in turn was followed by a Grand Banquet at which I was in charge of fried potatoes.

In the afternoon a delegation of the members of our barrack was sent to the Communist party celebrations to which we had been invited. The communists occupied two large barracks. Most of them had been arrested by order of the Vichy government shortly after the Germans had launched their surprise attack on Russia; before that, it should be remembered that communists were pro-German and against American capitalism and British imperialism. The communist paper *Humanité* had tried in vain to obtain the necessary authorizations to resume publication from the German authorities in Paris; even though they had signed a pact with Stalin, the Germans were not at all keen and therefore refused to play. But of course no sooner had Germany attacked Russia than, as one man, the French communist party swung over to the side of the Allies and, being already properly organized for underground work, soon proved its value as a resistance organization.

The communist barrack in which we were received was beautifully

decorated, and after toasts to the Allies, to Roosevelt, to King George, to Churchill, and naturally to Stalin (all with soft drinks, wine not being allowed in the camp), we were treated to a concert.

When at last we took our leave to our surprise and horror each one of the hundred and fifty men present shook hands with us and wished us good luck for our forthcoming trip "back home."

In spite of all the care and the precautions we had taken, before the end of day we discovered that, not only the communists, but very nearly all of the two-thousand-odd prisoners in the camp knew that we were preparing to escape.

The following day, which was to be our last in the prison camp if our attempt was successful, dragged slowly along as, still pretending to read or play games, we watched anxiously for any sign of change in the attitude of our guards. Every time a car came along the road passing by the camp we expected to see police reinforcements come to surround and search our barrack. But no, everything went on as usual, and then we began to wonder if they were not merely playing cat-and-mouse with us, whether they were not simply waiting to catch us red-handed.

Shortly after four, as we were preparing some tea, an old lady with three children came walking slowly by. That was the signal that all was ready for us outside; had the operation been called off, an old man instead of the old woman would have come by with the children.

Nothing else happened, and at last, at the end of the longest day in my life, we sat down to dinner. Those who were staying had agreed to lock the door after us and to conceal the key so that the police would be kept guessing afterward. It had also been agreed that one of them would start shouting and give the alarm as soon as it was daylight and that, after that, they would say that they had not heard us go and did not therefore know how or when we had managed to get out.

The only man in our barrack who did not know and whose nerves were therefore not on edge, was old Fleuret. We had beer to drink with our dinner, and while one of the boys attracted his attention I emptied my little phial into his glass. One of the Frenchmen who knew of his opposition to our plans but who did not know that we were merely going to put him to sleep turned pale.

"No, not that!" he said, thinking I was poisoning old Fleuret.

Someone managed to push him aside and explain just as he was going to grab Fleuret's glass, and a moment later our old friend turned round, picked up his beer, and drank it all off. Fleuret, usually one of the first to go to bed, seemed particularly chirpy and for a very long time stood on a box, gazing out of one of the windows, whistling softly to himself. The medicine was, however, beginning to work; he stopped whistling, scratched his head, and yawned. Pretending to talk, or play cards, or read, we were all watching him, waiting. The more he scratched the back of his head, the more he yawned, but he seemed glued to his box by the window, and we were beginning to wonder if the doctor had not fooled us.

At last he got down, went slowly toward his bed, and we all held our breath when he sat down on the edge of it, bent forward to unlace his boots, and toppled over sideways, fast asleep. Jumping up, we undressed him, put him to bed, and in a minute or two his characteristic snores, known throughout the camp, were echoing into the quiet July night; for the first time no one complained.

The Alsatian guard who had accepted to help us on condition that we take him all the way to London with us, was to be on duty at the top of the mirador nearest our barrack from midnight to four in the morning. He was to give us the all-clear signal by lighting his pipe.

By eleven o'clock all those of us who were going to escape were fully dressed with collars pinned up and hands gloved for crawling through the barbed wire. In order to make as little noise as possible each of us had pulled on heavy woolen socks over our shoes. In case of a surprise round inside the barracks—it had happened once since our arrival—we had made up dummies to put under our bedclothes. Raymond, the royalist, who loved a joke, had added a little touch of his own; over his bed, pinned to the wall and pointing toward the door, was a gilt paper-knife in the shape of an arrow with printed on it a publicity slogan for the "Golden Arrow . . . best and fastest service to London!"

At midnight the guards in the mirador were changed, and our last wait started. Twice we saw patrols go by; twice the minute hands of our watches crawled slowly round, and at half past two we began to despair; it had been agreed that if the signal had not been given by

three o'clock everything would be called off, because it would then be too close to daylight.

Shortly before three the guard at last struck a light and lit his pipe!

We unlocked our door, which had been carefully oiled the day before, and knew that it would open noiselessly. Watching the man in the other mirador, we quickly opened it, and the man with the fake canvas door slipped out and pinned it up in a matter of seconds. Instead of coming in again, he jumped across into the shadow of another barrack from where he could see the guards' barrack at the entrance of the camp and from where he was to keep watch throughout the operation.

Next man out was Michael Trotobas, who, with a strip of carpet rolled under his arm, was to open the way. As he crept silently toward the spot we had chosen he unrolled a ball of string which was to be a signal line; one tug was to mean "all clear, carry on" and three sharp tugs "danger, hold everything."

In silence and for what seemed hours we waited for the first all-clear signal. We all jumped when we heard the barbed wires twanging like piano wires and guessed that Trotobas was hard at it, pulling them out from the wooden stakes. He had a hammer wrapped in an old rag with which he was going to nail them back again afterward; so that we should leave no traces on the ground he had laid out the carpet over which we were to crawl.

After another interminable wait—a bare two minutes—the all-clear signal at last came through. The next to go was Robert Lyon, one of the bravest men it has ever been my lot to meet but who, like the majority of Frenchmen who consider that rules and regulations are for others only (one of the basic reasons for France's impossible politics), slipped out with a suitcase although it had been definitely ruled that we were to carry nothing.

We had calculated that the trip to the barbed wire and through it should not take more than a minute, and we had therefore decided to send a man out every sixty seconds in order to avoid any crowding by the fence. Each time, however, before sending the next man away, we had to make sure that the guard in the mirador facing the door was not looking our way.

My turn came at last, after Pierre Bloch. I found Trotobas standing

in the alley running between the two barbed-wire fences, ready to help us through, should we get stuck. He had, however, made such a good job of it that he rarely had to intervene, and crawling through was quite easy. Diving onto the strip of carpet, I wormed my way rapidly forward. I was almost through the second fence when a guard who had come down from yet another mirador appeared in the alley.

"Carry on," said Trotobas quietly, "I'll take care of him."

His rifle slung over his shoulder, the guard came to within twenty feet of Trotobas, who was getting ready to spring at him.

"Is it the English?" he asked in a loud whisper.

"Yes," answered Trotobas.

"I thought so. Well, don't make so much noise," he said, turning round and walking away.

He was one of the guards we had considered "most unsafe." Later we learned that he had been beaten and imprisoned because of our escape. We also learned that, outside of old Fleuret and the guards not on duty, no one slept much that night in the Mauzac prison camp. From every barrack hundreds of silent, staring men had watched us, hoping that we would make it.

The last man to leave pulled down the canvas door as the real one was locked behind him from the inside. As soon as he was through, closely followed by the first man out who had been all that time watching the guards' barrack, Trotobas rolled up his strip of carpet and hammered the barbed wires back to their stakes. The whole operation had lasted exactly twelve minutes.

In twos and threes we ran across a field, still in sight of the miradors but out of the glare of the arc lamps. Looking back toward the brilliantly illuminated camp was a strange and thrilling sight; it seemed impossible that we had passed three whole months in one of those huddled barracks.

By the time the alarm was given, as agreed, by one of the men in our barrack, we were all hidden away in the hayloft of a big farm near Bergerac. Much as we had foreseen, the Vichy police arrived in great numbers; within a matter of hours all road traffic within a hundred miles was being carefully checked, and crossroads, bridges, railway lines, and stations were being watched and guarded.

Also as foreseen, Madame Bloch was promptly arrested but released

within a matter of hours, for she had not one but half a dozen cast-iron alibis. At the time of our escape she was on the way back from Vichy where she had been received by a number of important government officials, all of whom had promised to see what they could do for her while their old colleague, Pierre Bloch, was rotting in a prison camp.

Our first visitor was one of our agents, Denise Mitrani, who was then known as the Woman in Red and who specialized in accompanying people to the Spanish frontier. Of course there was no question of our trying anything so foolish while the hue and cry was still on. Denise had come with a small camera with which we were to take portraits of each other for the identity papers which were being prepared for us.

Although the farm where we were was an isolated one and few people ever came that way we slept during the day and only went out for a little exercise after nightfall. We had one good meal brought to us from the farmhouse at about ten or eleven at night and another at six or seven in the morning, before turning in for another day's sleep.

Meanwhile, people in the region of Mauzac began to hear and spread the rumor that an R.A.F. bomber had landed in a nearby field on the night of our escape and that some dozen men had climbed aboard. People naturally believed this story, and although the police inspectors did not their subordinates soon grew tired of hunting for men who were probably back in England. Needless to say, the rumor had been started deliberately by some of our people.

We had just climbed back into our loft one morning when a gendarme strolled into the yard below us.

"Hey! Where are you? Come out!" he shouted. "I know you're there. The Woman in Red told me I would find you here!"

"You should have said that sooner," said Trotobas, jumping lightly down to the ground, still holding the copper wire with which he was preparing to lasso and strangle the gendarme, little dreaming that he was a member of the local resistance and that he had come to bring us our new identity cards.

With these we could start traveling in twos and threes and by various routes toward Lyons, our next rallying point. We were all very keen to go, especially after a fortnight in a hayloft. We drew lots, and

I was lucky enough to win. Two of us were to go together as far as Bergerac; from there we were to travel separately. We were given two bicycles which we were to leave with the proprietor of the café opposite the railway station. We covered the few kilometers that separated us from Bergerac without meeting a soul, and, once in the typical little Dordogne town, no one took any notice of us; but sitting at the terrace of the café opposite the station were four men whom we immediately recognized as police inspectors. Instead of getting off I cycled past, closely followed by my fellow traveler.

After a short consultation in a side street we came to the conclusion that handing in the bicycles might be too dangerous, and we regretfully abandoned them in an alleyway. At the station people were beginning to arrive for the Bordeaux-Lyons express which was due in a few minutes. Mingling with the crowd, we walked into the station. Our tickets had been purchased for us the day before, but by the entrance to the platform gendarmes were examining all identity cards. Ours passed the test with ease, and we at last climbed into two different coaches when the crowded train pulled in.

At Périgueux, the first stop, many people got off, but still more got on; and I was thankful, for, walking slowly up and down the platform, were two gendarmes, one of whom I knew well for having seen him often at the prison of Béleyme. For forty minutes of sweating agony, pretending to read the paper behind which I was hiding, I watched the two gendarmes pass again and again by the compartment window. I knew that if they suddenly had the inspiration of passing through the train I would have been recognized. At last the stationmaster blew his whistle, waved his red flag, and the train pulled slowly out.

We knew that police inspectors were liable to board the train and pass through it to examine passengers and their identity papers, especially in the region of Vichy where the train passed on its way to Lyons. The only danger for us was that one of the inspectors might know us from having seen us before or recognize us from photographs which the Vichy police had sent out all over the country. However, we passed Vichy in the dead of night, and the police did not board the train. The last real danger point was getting out of the station

at Lyons, where police inspectors scanned the faces of all travelers as they passed by the ticket collectors.

A traveler with no luggage was of course likely to attract attention. Luck was with me, however, for just in front of me a woman with two heavy bags and a baby was struggling slowly along in the crowd. She gladly accepted my offer of help, and, taking the child on one arm and one of her bags under the other, I gave her my ticket to give up with hers as we passed the barrier, thus looking for all the world like husband and wife.

Carefully following the instructions which we had learned by heart before leaving the farm, I boarded a certain tram near the station. I knew the exact fare and paid without asking for anything. The tram, I knew, would take a little over ten minutes to reach the suburb of Oullins, where I was to get off at the first stop after a big church. A hundred yards farther on, after a garage, I would come to a large café. There I was to walk in, go straight to the cashier, and ask her if she had a room for a traveler "not too tired." Without answering she would open a door behind the cash desk. The other side of that door, I would be safe.

The café I found easily, but instead of going straight in I walked past and looked into one or two shop windows in order to make sure that none of the half dozen people who had got off the tram after me were following me. Going back to the café, I went in and hesitated a second at sight of some twenty people sitting around at the various tables. My eyes roamed to the cash desk where the cashier was smiling at me. Walking up to her, I said:

"Pardon me, Madame, would you perchance have a room for a traveler *not too tired?*"

"Bravo! There's our first Englishman!" she said in a loud voice, shaking me heartily by the hand, and in a matter of seconds I was surrounded by all the customers patting me on the back, shaking hands, and congratulating me. The waiter produced a bottle of champagne, explaining that it was "on the house."

"Cigarette?"

"No, thank you. I would be grateful, though, if anyone had a little pipe tobacco."

"Tobacco? But of course!" said one of the clients, going to the street

door, opening it, and shouting to the tobacconist opposite: "Jules! Bring over a packet of tobacco! He's arrived!"

"Isn't it a little dangerous, talking like that? Don't you fear that the whole neighborhood will get to know?"

"But the whole neighborhood knows, monsieur! You have nothing to fear, you know . . . All the inhabitants of Oullins are for the Allies!"

I was nevertheless very glad to be taken to another and distant part of Lyons the same evening. A few days later one of the Oullins men told me that an extraordinary thing had happened.

"Would you believe it, monsieur? The police came to search the café. They found nothing of course, because the Oullins commissaire of police had been notified and had come round to warn us. But it is really surprising, don't you think?"

In less than a week, traveling separately in twos and threes, all the members of our little group of escapees had safely arrived in Lyons and were disseminated in various homes pending the next step, our departure for the Spanish frontier.

26

I shall never forget the hospitality and friendliness of the family of Alsatians where I was to spend a few days but where, in fact, I lived for several weeks while our trip to Spain was being slowly prepared. They were all to pay dearly for their attachment to our cause. The father died mysteriously while crossing the Pyrenees some months later, and shortly after the Germans had occupied Lyons the mother and her two sons were arrested. The youngest was put up against a wall and shot in the street with a number of other men; after having been tortured by the Gestapo the other was sent to a deportation camp but in such a state that he died in the train. The mother, who had also been tortured, was sent to Ravensbrück, from which, after the war, she returned a silent and horrified ghost, wondering why on earth she was alive and, today still, waiting patiently for her turn to leave a world which no longer holds any interest for her.

The two boys, still in their teens, smiled awkwardly and seemed a little put-out when I met them. While stepping into a hot bath a few minutes later—the first in almost a year!—I heard the youngest saying to his brother:

"Do you really think he is English? He doesn't look a bit like an Englishman, and he speaks French exactly like a Parisian."

"Yes, I know . . . Tell you what . . . We'll make him play bridge after dinner, this evening. All Englishmen are wonderful bridge players, so we'll soon know."

I did my best, but my bidding did not include any grand slams, and the only time my partner pulled one off was after I had left him

high and dry on a jump bid! However, I was saved any further shame and scorn by the appearance of one of our agents who rattled away in English what he had to say. After that they became my two inseparable bodyguards.

On the eve of our departure for Spain my friends informed me that to celebrate we would, that evening, be dining out with a few trusted friends, all Alsatians. We were a party of about twenty in a small black-market restaurant in the back room of a café, close to the Pont Morand, in the front of which people were playing cards. In the room where a long table had been prepared for us a lone diner was eating at a little table in a corner.

We were all very joyous, and the roast lamb was being served when a birdman walked into the café. Himself not unlike a vulture, with his long scraggy neck and his sharp-beak nose protruding from between the shiny black sunglasses he always wore, he had the strange and sinister aspect of some cruel and wicked character out of a Hans Andersen fairy tale. Tied to every button and buttonhole of his long black coat, pinned to it back and front, were two or three dozen small bird cages.

Without a word, without offering to sell any of his bright-eyed but silent birds, he walked slowly round our table.

"Far more dangerous than the police," murmured my neighbor as, still without a word, he walked out.

A few minutes later three men arrived in the café, glanced into the back room where we were now eating silently, then went to the counter.

"I have never seen those men before," whispered the proprietor, pouring out wine for us.

At a nod from my host a lady at the end of the table got up and said in a loud voice, as though continuing a conversation:

"I'll run and get some at the local tobacconist's; they know me well enough."

"I don't like the look of things," murmured my host, leaning over the table. "Go to the toilet at the end of the passage behind the kitchen. You will find a window and, just outside, our friend waiting for you."

Under the table my neighbor touched my knee, and I felt the cold

butt of a heavy automatic being pushed into my hand. Slipping it in my vest pocket, I got up. I went first into the toilet to check that the gun was loaded and a bullet in the chamber, then, turning out the light, I opened the window, scrambled over the sill, and jumped into a narrow alley a few feet below.

"This way," whispered the lady who was waiting there for me. "Listen carefully. We are going to come out on the large avenue by the quay. We will walk slowly, and you will hold me round the waist, as though we were lovers. If anything happens the orders are that you must get away; therefore, don't hesitate because of me. Shoot if you have to. In that case, I shall deliberately drop to the ground, and you can run for it."

"But . . . my dear madame——"

"Shut up and don't be a fool! Those are orders, do you hear!"

"Right."

A black Citroën car drew up at the corner of the alley as we reached the tree-lined quay which now bears the name of Jean Moulin, a famous member of the French Resistance.

"We were just in time," murmured my companion.

The half dozen policemen standing at the corner of the Pont Morand took no notice of the two lovers slowly crossing it.

Her head on my shoulder, over which she was looking back, my companion could see the police cars arriving and the whole block of houses being cordoned off.

"Looks like a proper raid," she whispered in my ear.

Having at last reached the other side of the river, she made me climb on a tram that took us back again, past the café that now seemed full of people. We got off a few stops farther on, near the Place Bellecour. Without a word of explanation my guide took me into a house, walked up two flights, and rang at a door. It was opened almost immediately by an elderly man who recognized her and smilingly asked us in.

"I can't stay. Look after this gentleman. Someone will fetch him in the morning."

"At what time?" asked the elderly man.

"Shortly after six. Good-by." And, with a smile, she gently closed the door behind her, leaving us standing.

"Your room is ready, monsieur. Are you tired?"

"What do you mean? You did not know I was coming, did you?"

"No. I only knew that you, or another, might be coming in case of need."

"I see. I am sorry, we were not introduced."

"We are not supposed to know each other. Let me show you your room."

Needless to say, I did not get much sleep. Early next morning my host brought me a cup of tea and some biscuits.

"A guide will be calling for you in about ten minutes. Did you sleep well?"

"I am afraid not. I was worried about my friends."

"Yes, I know. Everything is all right. No one was arrested. After examining the identity papers of all present they let your friends finish their dinner."

"Do you mean to say they didn't notice that two of the guests had disappeared?"

"No. It appears that a man who was eating alone in a corner spontaneously offered to sit in your place. As to the lady who brought you here, she was back a few minutes later, victoriously brandishing a packet of black-market cigarettes, saying that she had had to go all the way to the Place Bellecour to get them!"

27

What pleasure people can get out of crawling up the side of a mountain when they can so easily go another way round by car, or through it by train, or again, if they really must get up on top, when they can sit so comfortably in an airplane that will do all the climbing for them, is something I cannot understand. Why people like camping out, getting smoke in their eyes, eating badly cooked food full of cinders, and shivering in the early morning when they can so easily sleep in a real bed and eat good food properly prepared and cooked, is another of those mysteries.

However, to be quite honest, up to the outbreak of war I did like picnicking on the grass and on occasion going for a half-hour stroll along some mountain path or other, though of course I never did go in for rope-and-alpenstock stuff; I always considered that ropes should be reserved for the exclusive use of sailors, cowboys, and hangmen who would otherwise be on the dole, and for would-be suicides, but that the rest of the world can easily do without. As to alpenstocks, they look well over a fireplace, but that is all.

Six years of army life changed all that and cured me completely and forever of roughing it merely for the fun of it. The camping-and-picnic cure was a long tedious one, for it was only very gradually that I got to dislike and then to hate tents, camp beds, sleeping bags, smoking fires, and iron rations. Of mountaineering, however, I was cured in one shot, the day I had to cross the Pyrenees on foot. Actually, it took me two days and three nights, during which I wandered up and down—but with far more ups than downs—all over that part

of the Pyrenees known as the Maladetta Mountains. Maladetta means "cursed." And they were, probably as much as they had ever been since prehistoric man discovered that, short of whacking people over the head, cussing is by far and large the most efficient and satisfying way of letting off steam.

The trip to Perpignan at the foot of the Pyrenees, with the Woman in Red acting as our guide, was easy, and we met with no trouble. The all-night climb up to the Spanish frontier in summer shoes, and reaching it at last the next morning in bitter cold and snow, was no fun, but I managed it like the rest of the party. It was on the way down, on the Spanish side, that I cracked up. I stumbled once or twice, then I tripped on a root and went flat on my face, but instead of getting up again I thought I would rest for a few seconds and woke up some twelve hours later. The others had quite rightly gone on, and from then on I was on my own. Two days later, with bleeding feet, an empty stomach, and a raging thirst, I crawled slowly through the streets of the little Spanish town of Figueras until I came to a military barrack where I stumbled in, past the sentry at the door who yelled and screamed until half the Spanish Army turned out. I explained that I was an English officer, that I had escaped, but refused to say more than give them the name of Bush, Captain Bush, and my army number, the real one, so that if, as I hoped, the information did trickle through to the British Embassy in Madrid and from there to the War Office in London my number would help them find out who I really was.

It was then I discovered, much to my surprise, that all Spanish officers were not necessarily pro-German. The one who questioned me slapped me heartily on the back, explained that he would himself take me to the prison—he was sorry but those were the orders—waved aside the escort about to accompany us, and took me to lunch in a good restaurant.

Except that food was a little more plentiful, Spanish prisons were much like French prisons. There were also fleas, bugs, and lice, but much larger and stronger ones and far hungrier than their French colleagues. In the prisons many of the inmates were enemies of the regime and, as such, did all in their power to help us, thinking that if we won the war we would surely put an end to the Spanish dictator-

ship as well. We were not, unfortunately, all that courageous. It was thanks to these political prisoners who had means of communicating with the outside world that the British Embassy in Madrid was able to keep track of me, for no sooner was a claim for my release lodged with the Spanish authorities than I was moved to another prison in order that the said authorities should be in a position to answer truthfully: "We are sorry, but there is no prisoner of the name of Bush in this or that particular prison." Each time, however, within a matter of days, a local British consul, or the Embassy in Madrid, would receive a telephone call or a message, explaining that *el Capitano* Bush was now in the Modello of Barcelona, or in the State Prison of Reos, or the Sarragossa jail.

I was thus made to travel and visit prisons, old and new. The Modello of Barcelona, supposedly the most modern and up-to-date prison in Europe, was built on American plans. Unfortunately, it was not occupied and lived in in the American way. Instead of two in each cell, we were rarely less than a dozen, which meant sleeping in turns because of the reduced floor space; and in spite of steel floors and electrically operated doors, Spanish vermin coated the walls, waiting for available skin space on the prisoners.

Being transferred from one prison to another was always good fun, a sort of holiday outing. At first I had been ashamed and disgusted, but having once learned the drill, it became quite enjoyable.

The *carabineros* with their funny hard-boiled hats and immense rifles would turn up with yards of chain. After carefully chaining us together (I was rarely alone on these trips), they would march us to the local railway station and there wait on the platform until it was almost departure time. A crowded holiday train in England or a packed subway train in New York would be considered rather empty in Spain. The *carabineros* would walk up to any compartment, open the door, and invite the occupants to get out. The number of people that did get out always amazed me. We would then get in and sit down, and, after us, the people would all climb in again. Spaniards are never ashamed of talking to a prisoner, and I soon found that the magic word *inglés* always worked wonders. There was never any argument, off came the chains, and out would come grapes, bread, toma-

toes, onions, wine, cigarettes, oranges, anything that might bring a little happiness to the *inglés*.

By the time the train left the station, anything from ten minutes to an hour or two late, there were always passengers outside as well as inside. Sooner or later, when the train had gathered a little speed —it never seemed to gain very much—people who had been riding outside would begin squeezing frantically in; dozens would slide off the roof of the coach, legs dangling, gradually worming their way into the tight wad of sweating, laughing, and swearing humanity inside. With a final hoot the train would then thunder laboriously through a tunnel. At the other end, with shouts of delight, the roof-top passengers would climb out again. I never heard of any getting peeled off by tunnels, but I am sure that it must have happened sometimes.

Prisoners often talked of Miranda de Ebro. There was magic in the name; Miranda de Ebro was a sort of haven—once there, one might still be held a long time, but it was not really a prison. Miranda de Ebro was the official internment camp, and sooner or later allied prisoners who reached it were finally released. Having covered part of the Spanish Civil War as a newspaper correspondent, I remembered Miranda as a small, unattractive little town, spank in the middle of a long flat plain on the road between Vitoria and Burgos. I remembered that somewhere on the road near there was a village where it was dangerous for any driver to stop. Being newspapermen, we had of course stopped and had had stones thrown at us, but we had managed to catch sight of some of the inhabitants of the village. Without exception, all had six fingers to each hand and six toes to each foot, and we saw two at least who walked round on all fours; it was a village where the inhabitants had intermarried for centuries, and what we had seen were some of the results of these consanguine unions. Try as I could, that was all I could remember about Miranda and its surroundings.

One day at last, during yet another transfer, this time with a lot of French and Belgian prisoners, I was told that we were being taken to Miranda de Ebro. It did indeed look like a sort of paradise when we saw it in the evening sunlight at the end of a long dusty road. There was a large entrance gate, and sentries mounting guard in front of a fine-looking building to one side of it, and a swimming pool with

a cement tower and diving boards facing it. Behind we could see long lines of cement barracks with tiled roofs and a large open space, round which a cheering crowd was watching a football match. We were all smiles as we marched through the entrance gate.

Miranda de Ebro was, however, only a mirage. There never was, there never had been, and there never would be water in the swimming pool; and here, under the burning sunlight of Spain, bugs and fleas and lice, plus great rats that occasionally attacked the camp dogs in broad daylight, thrived and lived quite happily.

Life in Miranda was, nevertheless, admirably organized. In the large barracks which had been divided into a ground and a first floor, each of which had been partitioned into lodgings, rooms, cabins, cubby-holes, there lived four thousand men of all nationalities, of all ages from fifteen to eighty, and from every social sphere and walk of life. Two days after my arrival I shared a "three-berth cabin" with a bishop and a professor of mathematics; our neighbors, a French engine driver and a famous Vienna surgeon, seemed to get on splendidly together.

The camp was guarded by a detachment of Spanish troops who never bothered us much, except for the morning and evening roll calls and flag parades which often lasted an hour or more.

In spite of my impatience and a frantic desire to be on my way back to London, in spite of all the restrictions and the inevitable red tape, the three months I spent at Miranda went by like a three-week holiday. My nationality, military status, and officer's rank had been duly "recognized" by the Spanish authorities, and as senior British officer in the camp I was invited to be present at the interrogations of all new internees claiming to be British subjects of one sort or another. Since all "recognized" British subjects were sooner or later transferred to Madrid and from there to Gibraltar and England, most of the French crossing the Pyrenees claimed to be Canadian. I was supposed to help eliminate the false Canadians, but though no one ever said a word, with most of the Spanish officers the tacit understanding was that my job was really to make the nationality claims of all those Canadians seem plausible. It was not always easy, especially when awkward questions were fired at the poor devils.

"You have no identity papers?"

"No, sir."

"What is your nationality?"
"Canadian."
"Where were you born?"
"Er . . . in Quebec, sir."
"Where do you live in Canada?"
"In Quebec."
"What street, what number?"

There was always a good deal of hesitation after that question. One evident Parisian one day calmly replied:

"Number fifteen, Rue du Cherche-Midi, in the——"

"In the upper part of town, I know," I interrupted, certain that he was going to add the number of the Paris district.

"How many provinces are there in Canada?" was a trap question often shot at an obvious French peasant.

Sitting opposite the man being questioned, I generally managed to draw a figure nine on my blotter, but that did not always succeed.

"Six," would answer some, reading my nine the wrong way round.

"Ninety-nine," finally blurted one who had been hesitating and for whom I had drawn a second, somewhat larger nine.

It took the British Embassy in Madrid an average of three months to get a British subject liberated. The Germans of course resented this and would occasionally put the pressure on Franco, whose one great fear was being drawn into a war that was evidently being lost by the Axis partners. Documents would then get sidetracked at the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and red tape would be played to the extreme limit. Then somehow, by some error of the British Admiralty, a shipload of wheat from South America would find itself being escorted into the port of Gibraltar. There also, there was a good deal of red tape. In the end, however, documents would find their way back to the proper people, red tape would dwindle to a minimum, and the wheat ship would be allowed to proceed to a Spanish port as, once again, British subjects were being liberated.

Once a week two large trucks belonging to the Embassy would arrive with cigarettes, food, clothing, medicine, and blankets and would go back with whatever British subjects happened to be on the list of those to be liberated.

The list, which rarely exceeded twelve or fifteen names, was usually

posted up the day before the arrival of the Embassy trucks, and the happy few were immediately surrounded by crowds of people who had personal, urgent, confidential, and desperate messages for people in Madrid, in London, in New York—people who certainly did not know but who, did they know, would move heaven and earth to get them out! And the next day, when the trucks were about to return to Madrid, the contrast between the boundless joy of those about to leave, the indifference of those who knew that their turn was coming soon, and the infinite sadness of those who knew that their name would never appear on any list was heartbreaking. Among those for whom Miranda was a terminus, a defeat, were Frenchmen who had foolishly insisted on claiming their real nationality (the great majority of refugees were warned about this by prisoners all the way through to Miranda), but also hundreds of others, refugees from all over Europe, and even men who had fought in the International Brigade in the Civil War, men who had been in Miranda since 1937, men who are probably still there today!

Although the homeland of the Great Inquisition, although the most religious of all Catholic countries, Spain was the most tolerant fascist country with the Jews. The Spanish officers never interfered with any of their religious rites which they practiced freely in the camp. The Polish internees, on the other hand, were furiously anti-Semitic, and on more than one occasion the Spanish soldiers had to fix bayonets in order to save a Jew who had had the misfortune of entering or even of passing too close to the Polish barrack. Even in England the Poles pestered and sometimes ill-treated their own Jews; a number of them deserted, and finally public opinion obliged the British Government to intervene.

The Poles, who at that time had very little hope of ever being set free, were all escape fiends. They were always elaborating fantastic schemes of one sort or another, digging tunnels, preparing false identity papers, and cutting and sewing fake Spanish uniforms. Getting out of Miranda was by no means easy, if only because of the wide-open space all around the camp; also, the Portuguese frontier was two hundred miles away, and anyone hiking through the arid plains and mountains of Spain could hardly expect to pass unnoticed. More often

than not, men who had succeeded in getting away were brought back completely exhausted two or three days later.

The one exception to this rule seemed to be a Gurkha, the only Indian in the camp, who seemed to escape whenever he wished but who usually came back of his own free will the same day or the next morning. He had the stealth and patience which no white man could ever have or hope to acquire. I once watched him escape unnoticed in brilliant sunlight in midafternoon. Had I not seen him curl up on the ground and drag some old rags over him, I would have sworn that it was indeed but a bundle of rags dumped there. Inch by inch, however, the rags moved nearer and nearer to the low stone wall along which the Spanish sentries patrolled day and night. The Gurkha under his rags moved much as the hour hand of a clock—unless you keep your eye on it, you are not conscious of its movement. It was impossible to detect any movement in the bundle of rags, and yet in just under two hours it had reached the wall, some twenty feet from where it had started moving. Then the heap of rags suddenly seemed a little smaller; the man under them had simply slithered over the wall and under the barbed wire with the silence and speed of a lizard. Next morning he would walk calmly up to the main gate; grinning from ear to ear, he would be conducted to the only cell in the camp, from which he would emerge, still grinning, three days later.

Like most camps in Europe at war, Miranda had its tunnels.

The Spaniards one day noticed that a certain number of French and Polish internees were exchanging all their personal belongings for tins of sardines, bread, chocolate, water bottles, and various other items which people about to escape would be likely to want. All the troops were called out, handed picks and shovels, and after an hour or two of prodding here and there a tunnel was finally found and ripped open.

On another occasion all went well until the very last minute. Under the directives of real engineers a team of French and Polish internees had dug a beautiful tunnel, starting from the corner of one of the barracks and extending well beyond the walls and barbed wire surrounding the camp. This time they were more security-minded and careful with their preparations. All those who were to escape were waiting, ready to crawl into the tunnel at the other end of which two

professional miners were vigorously digging straight up when the alarm was sounded. By sheer bad luck one of the sentries who had momentarily abandoned his post and who was about to squat just on that spot suddenly felt the ground giving way under him and hands gripping his legs, trying to drag him underground. Howling and imploring the "Mother of God to make the Devil let go of his feet," the terrified sentry gave the game away.

There was only one Spaniard who seemed to be equally detested by all, guards and internees, a noncommissioned officer who had lost an eye during the Civil War and whom the French had promptly nicknamed the "Eye of Moscow." He always carried a long loaded stick with which he sometimes threatened prisoners. One morning he was foolish enough to go for a very old man who was late for roll call and to knock him down with a blow of his stick in front of the lined-up men. The guard was called out and had to load and threaten to shoot into the milling crowd before the "Eye of Moscow" could be extricated. In way of punishment all four thousand internees were made to stand on the parade ground for the best part of the day, all except the old man and the bruised brute, who were both taken to the infirmary. He never again appeared inside the camp with a stick in his hands.

Spanish soldiers always remind me of the old Charlie Chaplin films, and whenever they go on parade they become irresistibly comic. Excepting the officers (most of whom also have a civilian job because of the miserable pay) and one or two parade-and-propaganda detachments like the Moorish Guard and the troops at the frontier opposite Gibraltar, the soldiers are rarely clean and never properly dressed.

Every Sunday morning we had to turn out to march by the colonel and his officers in their Sunday best, crowded round the Nationalist flag on a miniature grandstand overlooking the football ground. On these occasions half the guards became musicians and formed a band behind which we had to march round and round. The elderly officers, all of whom had a tendency to grow fat, had the knack of accentuating their rotundity by draping large silk sashes round their middles. For us, however, the real fun was to watch the bandsmen with all their finery of white belts, white epaulets, white gloves—but always their tattered string-soled cloth shoes tied to their ankles with pieces of

string. I once saw one in civilian striped trousers! There was always at least one of them not in step, or flourishing his shiny brass bugle at the wrong moment, and when they started complicated figures of crisscross marching and changing formation while playing, the effect was irresistible, and we could not help laughing.

Sometimes the colonel would make a speech, generally a short one, which was afterward translated into English and French. Once, we had the visit of German officials, and there was no laughter at the parade that Sunday morning; we were all anxious, wondering if it was not a prelude to the handing over of certain internees—there were at least two or three whom the Germans would have been glad to have. When at last one of the Germans stepped forward and started speaking in French, all listened in silence. There was a general sigh of relief, however, when it became apparent that he was there merely to tempt men back. He should have known better, and there were discreet smiles when he said that any of the internees wishing to go back home could do so, that they would be immediately released by the Spanish authorities, and that, not only would they have nothing to fear from the German authorities, but they would be taken all the way back home free of charge!

No one moved, and I noticed that the Spanish officers were smiling at each other when, like the rustling of the wind, a strange murmur spread along the lines of internees. A little fair-haired man walked quietly and boldly to the front.

"Here is a reasonable man," exclaimed the German, with a large smile and evidently hoping that others would follow. "You will leave for home this very day, my friend. Where are you from?"

There was a deathly silence, and a great roar, like the roar of a football crowd, went up when in a clear voice the little man answered:

"I am from London."

"Arrest him, arrest that man!" shouted the Spanish colonel.

Still smiling, the little Englishman turned and raised his hand, and in the deep silence which immediately followed he had time to say in the same clear voice:

"You see, it is always the same thing: Germans never keep their promises."

And again the four thousand internees roared and cheered and

danced with joy as grinning Spanish soldiers led the culprit off to the lock-up.

We were not supposed to leave our barracks after nightfall. Many of us were, nevertheless, obliged to make frequent trips to the latrines at one end of the camp because of the rancid oil which constituted the main cooking element for all the food we ate. In the early days there had been doors to the *retiros*, but all of them had long since been transformed into furniture or cabin walls and so well camouflaged that the Spaniards were never able to find them. Visiting the *retiros* after dark or, as we used to say, "calling on Franco," necessitated a good deal of courage, for they were infested by great rats that fought and squealed furiously, regardless and unafraid of men.

As already stated (surprising scientific facts are worth repeating), Spanish bugs and lice are very strong and healthy, go in for large families, and generally seem to enjoy life thoroughly. There can be no possible comparison with the famished and hunted vermin of northern countries. The Embassy in Madrid sent us regular supplies of disinfectant, bottles of magic liquids and boxes of super-magic powders that were supposed to kill instantly anything smaller than a tomcat. But the trouble was that it had all been manufactured for northern weaklings, not for Spanish vermin which, far from dying, seemed to thrive on it; one of my neighbors swore that, with the powder and a little patience, he could make bugs eat out of his hand. The bugs were indeed so gorgeous that we decided to hold a bug show on the lines of a dog show or a baby show. The first prize, a carton of English cigarettes, went to a Pole whose bug, presented in a satin-lined box, would easily have covered a sixpence or a dime.

The only way of getting a little sleep for those of us who could not get used to them was to put the feet of our beds—wooden frames to which sacking had been nailed—into saucers full of vinegar, but even that was useless if the bugs happened to feel really hungry. They would then form up in close order, whole battalions of them, and, marching in step at least as well as the Spanish soldiers, they would slowly walk up the walls of our barrack, across the ceiling, and, like trained parachutists, drop in groups of fifteen or twenty onto our beds!

The saddest internees of Miranda were two British sailors who had managed to cross over into Spain and who, after a memorable binge

that had ended in a brawl and the local Spanish jail, had decided to jump at the opportunity of getting themselves interned. A police inspector who spoke English had vainly tried to dissuade them; tired of naval discipline, with a vague notion that internees were people who led a wonderful life with nothing to do, they had refused to be taken back to the frontier post and had therefore been sent to Miranda. All the other internees naturally considered them as traitors, and the two found themselves completely isolated among four thousand men who would have nothing to do with them. They lived in the corner of a barrack occupied by members of the International Brigade, the only men who would tolerate their presence. Being British, they were, however, given their share of the food which arrived from the Embassy and a few cigarettes if any were left over after the distribution. The one thing they never received, however, was the thirty-five peseta allocation which the Embassy sent once a week to every British subject in the camp. They often came round to beg us to intervene with the Ambassador; they were sorry and ready to face the music of a court-martial and the certainty of a heavy sentence. They explained that an English prison, even a firing squad, would be preferable to the hostility of thousands of men living round them—even the Spaniards despised them.

In the hope of earning a little money they one day made pastry out of the bag of flour which I had given them. They were hoping to sell it in the barrack at the end of the camp in which was held a sort of clandestine market where one could purchase almost anything short of arms and ammunition. A Frenchman had even opened a bar there, where for a peseta or two it was possible to sit at a table and drink a cup of coffee or a glass of acid Spanish wine.

The two sailors worked like Trojans at a small stove which they had built against the outside wall of their barrack, and that evening one of them walked away with a tray tied round his neck with a piece of string and loaded with thick jam tarts and pieces of cake that looked as though they had been chopped out of one of the barrack walls. Thus equipped, he met one of the Spanish officers.

"Where are you going with all that?"

"Er . . . nowhere . . . I was just taking a stroll."

"Those cakes are yours?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know that it is forbidden to sell anything here?"

"Oh . . . I . . . I wasn't going to sell them. Those cakes are mine and . . . and I was going to eat them."

"All of them?"

"Yes, sir."

"I don't believe you."

"Honestly, sir . . . I swear . . ."

"Of course if you swear, that is different. Look, I'll give you ten minutes to eat them all up. Otherwise, you will have to finish them in the cell."

The sailor easily swallowed three tarts and one of the mysterious little slabs of solid pastry, but a fourth tart was not so easy to munch, and he was no longer smiling when he took another cake on his tray as a crowd of internees gathered round.

"Can I . . . offer any?"

"No. But you can sit down, if you like."

Sitting against a tree, he ate everything on his tray. Great drops of sweat were running down his forehead as he slowly chewed the last cake.

"I think I am going to . . ."

"Yes. Take him to the infirmary," said the Spanish officer, looking rather like one of his ancestors must have looked after a sitting of the Grand Inquisition.

28

Every morning at five minutes to nine, his green felt hat perfectly horizontal on the top of his head, Herr Funken, counselor at the German Embassy, appeared at the corner of the little street facing the Prado Museum. Herr Funken did not know that the hotel by which he passed before crossing over toward the Prado had been rented by the British Embassy and that all "British subjects" bound for Gibraltar or Lisbon lodged there on their way through Madrid. Herr Funken also did not know that for the last several days two heads peering over the fourth-floor balcony had watched him go by.

"I'm positive it's a German," said Lola.

"I think so too, but we must make sure," said Joan.

"I'm certain, I tell you! Look at the way he walks . . . and that hat!"

"Lola, I give the orders, I'm the eldest."

"Yes, I know! You are seventeen and I'm only fifteen . . . but I'm the one that has all the ideas, aren't I?"

"Don't argue. Tomorrow we shall follow him. Like that, we'll jolly soon find out more about him."

Lola and Joan were two little English girls who, since the death of their parents in 1930, had been living with their grandmother who owned a large house in Majorca. Daughters of an Indian army officer and an Irish mother, speaking perfect Spanish, used to running around naked-footed in the hot Mediterranean sunlight, they were both furiously patriotic. Few British subjects had shown such enthusiasm as theirs at the outbreak of war.

They soon made life quite hellish for the British consul at Palma.

Right from the very beginning they harassed the poor man with requests, visits, and countless reports. They knew the Spanish people far better than he did, far better than any consul or ambassador, come to that. Therefore, what was he waiting for? Why had he not explained to the ambassador in Madrid that the thing to do was draw Spain into the war by the side of the Allies? . . . He had? . . . Then why did not London send out another ambassador since the existing one had done nothing about it?

Meanwhile, when not at school they spent their time distributing all the propaganda material they could lay hands on at the consulate, in travel agencies, or anywhere else. As that did not seem to have much effect on the local population they started jotting down the B.B.C. news bulletins, translating them into Spanish and patiently copying them out on pages torn out of their school copybooks, then pasting them on trees or walls for the islanders to read.

The inevitable result of all this activity was that one fine day, in spite of the angry protests of their grandmother, the Spanish police came to search the house.

"You should be ashamed of being neutral," snorted Lola as one of the police inspectors emptied her schoolbag on the table.

Fearing the worst, the grandmother was nevertheless proud of her two granddaughters. Down at the port everyone knew them, and now that they had the official police "against them" and that, instead of meekly answering questions, they had argued with the inspectors, they were much admired.

Spanish police inspectors have a sense of humor and far more patience than their French or Italian colleagues, but much as they liked Joan and Lola, they had no choice but to carry out the Provincial Governor's orders after the affair of the British sailors. Through the son of one of the port radio operators Joan had discovered that an English freighter had been torpedoed but that the crew had been picked up by a Spanish trawler that was due to arrive next morning. The two girls went about making preparations, talking to all their friends and distributing paper Union Jacks to all who promised to go down to the port to welcome the brave English sailors. Within a week their grandmother was advised that she could remain but that the two

girls would have to leave for the mainland within twenty-four hours. They were to reside in Madrid.

Accompanied down to the boat by half the population whistling and jeering at their police escort, Joan and Lola boarded the Barcelona boat with their grandmother.

At the Embassy in Madrid it had been considered a good idea to lodge them in the transit hotel where they could be of use because of their knowledge of Spanish and where they could be kept under discreet observation. They were both charming and delighted to help and comfort the hotel guests, most of whom arrived straight from Miranda. Within a week, however, they had both got into new trouble. Having discovered where the German Embassy was, they had taken turns at spitting at the porter, and Lola had thumbed her nose at the Spanish policeman chasing them. From the police station they had been fetched by an Embassy car and conducted into the presence of the rather formidable-looking military attaché who, after scowling at them in silence, had warned them that any further incident would entail their immediate arrest and deportation from the country.

"All right, then, we'll go to London," said Lola, stamping her foot. "There at least we will find people ready and willing to do something instead of just standing around!"

Trying desperately not to laugh, the attaché had roared something about discipline being the first condition of service.

"We'd appreciate it immensely if you could keep an eye on those kids during your stay here," said the same attaché when I reported to him a few days later. "They're better off here than in the blitz in London."

They had gladly consented to become my guides and interpreters for the few necessary purchases I had to make after three months of Miranda.

"The Señor is English," they would say in a confidential whisper to the shopkeepers, and as if by magic all the little things I needed would appear from under counters or out of back-shops.

"You see! They love the English, I tell you. They're afraid of Franco, that's all, otherwise they'd be fighting on our side. They hate the Germans, really."

"Is that so?"

"Didn't you know? We'll show you; we'll just go by the German Embassy."

"Certainly not!"

"Only to look. We promise you we will be good; we shall not even cross over."

They were quite right. It was easy to see which, of the English and the Germans, was better liked in Madrid; one had only to walk by the German Embassy with its high front wall topped with barbed wire, its heavy iron doors and the eight or ten policemen ever on duty outside, and then, a bare hundred yards farther on, pass by the British Embassy with its front door always wide open and no one guarding it inside or out.

"Were you going out?"

"Yes," said Joan, stepping out of the lift in front of her sister and glancing at the clock over the porter's desk.

"Oh . . . I thought that you were taking me to the Prado this morning."

"Dear me, yes! We had completely forgotten," said Lola, biting her lip.

"No matter; I can go some other time. May I come with you wherever you may be going? I'll see something of Madrid."

"Oh no, I'm sorry. It's—— I'm afraid it is impossible."

"Look, you take the captain to the Prado. I'll run that errand alone; it won't take me long, and I'll join you after," and without waiting for an answer Joan ran out of the hotel.

Lola was evidently furious but said nothing. As we crossed over toward the museum I noticed Joan ahead of us, walking fairly quickly behind a little man with a green felt hat.

The Louvre in Paris has the most precious collection of paintings in the world, the New York Metropolitan Art Museum has the most expensive, and the National Gallery in London perhaps the most loved; but to my mind the Prado has the finest of them all. The paintings in the Prado are certainly the most important thing in Spain today and one of the most important things in the rest of the world.

Moving around in a sort of enchantment from the Dürer portraits to the impish Bosch monsters, from the dazzling light of the Goyas

to the heavy court atmosphere of the Velázquez, from the tortured elongated El Grecos to the heartbreaking horror of the later Goyas, I had somewhat forgotten the presence of my young guide, who brought me back to earth with a sharp tug at my sleeve.

"Come and see something," she said, dragging me round a corner and stopping in front of a Virgin Mary by Murillo.

"Do you like that one particularly, Lola?"

"Yes . . . no. That's not the point. Do you know where it was before?"

"No, where?"

"It was in the Louvre in Paris . . . from where it was stolen!"

"Not so loud, please, Lola. People are looking at us. How is it that it is here if it was stolen from the Louvre?"

"Marshal Pétain gave it to Franco. And I say that is a theft, for you can't tell me that the French approved or were even asked. And of course Franco never bothered to find out. Those two make a pair," added Lola as I dragged her quickly away.

The next morning a large flowerpot hit the pavement outside our hotel and exploded into a thousand pieces, just missing Herr Funken on the way to his office at the German Embassy.

"My goodness!" said an old lady running out. "What a fright that gave me. Why, señor, it might well have killed you!"

"Yes. Flowerpots should never be put on window ledges. I was indeed lucky," said Herr Funken, raising his hat from the top of his clean-shaven skull.

"Tell me," said Lola later that day to a young R.A.F. pilot who had managed to get through to Spain after having been shot down in the North of France, "how do you manage to hit a target dead on with a small bomb?"

"Well, it is quite complicated, really, and it doesn't always work out, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Joan, glancing at her sister.

Lola and Joan were finally deported by order of the Spanish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. I had by then gone on to Gibraltar, but I heard all about it later from their grandmother, in London.

Once a week, every Friday evening, the members of the German colony in Madrid gathered together in one of the large private draw-

ing rooms of a big hotel. This was a purely social affair at which they drank Spanish beer (sometimes excellent), played cards, talked of the homeland, listened to lectures or music; but at midnight sharp the evening always wound up the same way. All those present stood facing one of the walls draped with a long, red velvet curtain, and as they all sang *Deutschland über alles* the curtain opened over a full-size portrait of the Führer which they all saluted with raised hands.

How had Lola and Joan discovered this? How had they planned, organized, and brought off their coup? They would never tell. But one night, when over a hundred Germans were singing and saluting stiffly, the red curtain slowly opened on the smiling face of Winston Churchill.

The two girls would not even have been suspected, had they not wished to keep the portrait of Hitler as a sort of trophy; they had been seen leaving the hotel with a large roll of paper.

29

"Passengers for London, please prepare to embark," announced an R.A.F. sergeant.

"At last," said a white-haired general, emptying and putting down his glass.

Every evening for the last week a bus had run us through the narrow streets of Gibraltar to the airstrip facing Spain at the foot of the famous rock, and each time, after the same interminable wait at the officers' mess, the same sergeant had appeared to announce that we could climb back into the bus, since there would be no flight to England that night.

I was the only civilian to embark, and what a civilian! Having for all luggage a long chain of garlic round my neck and a large volume of the Prado paintings under my arm, I must have seemed a very mysterious companion indeed for my fellow travelers, most of whom were high-ranking officers. Every night the bus called for me first, so that they did not know where I came from, and they could not help looking askance at my stained, dirty suit, my shoes down at the heels, and my bare head not unlike that of some great prehistoric chicken, with its short, bristly hair beginning to grow again after a last Miranda-prison crop.

From the very first night the drill had been ever the same at the airstrip, with always the same security officer waiting for me to take me into the officers' mess and order me a drink. This time, however, it looked as though we were really going. The sergeant called out the

passengers by name and made them sign the passenger list he was holding.

"And one civilian for whom I shall sign," said the security officer, who had just come in.

On the tarmac an American Dakota had taxied up. Grinning and chewing, a young American boy helped us up the short steep ladder, made us sit down on the uncomfortable metal seats running the entire length of the cabin, showed us how to fix our safety belts, and gave us each two thick blankets for the night, which he said might be chilly. We were already taxiing toward the end of the runway.

The engines coughed and roared, and after a short silence they all roared together, and we began to move and gather speed along the runway. I knew that it was not very long and that there was a sheer drop into the sea at the end of it, should we not by then be airborne. We were.

An hour or so later we passed in sight of Lisbon glittering like a diamond brooch on a great black velvet cushion.

Dawn found us flying over a thick blanket of clouds. The sun slowly climbed up out of them, and we sat awed by the fantastic beauty of it all, a sight that Turner had never even dreamed of! A little later the clouds began to drift apart, and through the gaps we caught glimpses of a steel-gray Atlantic. Then a little to our left I recognized the shape of Land's End, and we rocked slightly as half a dozen small white clouds slid by under our wing. A moment later a member of the crew came through to say that he was sorry that instead of taking us to London he would have to land right away. He explained with a grin that the people down there were not accepting his recognition signals. Now I knew what had made us rock; those little white clouds had been ack-ack shell bursts!

Though the strip was a small one the landing was perfect, and it was an extraordinary sensation to jump out into a typical English countryside after well over a year in various French and Spanish prisons. We were in Cornwall, and long before we had reached the sheds on the other side of the field the security officer who had run over in a jeep to meet us was already shooting questions at me, too many for my liking.

"You have no papers of any sort? No transport voucher? Nothing?"

"Nothing, I'm sorry. A War Office car was to have picked me up at Hendon. That is all I know. Would you be kind enough to have me driven up to town?"

"I'm afraid you will have to give me a few details about yourself first. Who are you? Where have you come from?"

"Sorry, old man. You see, I am an agent just back from overseas. That is all I can tell you. Now, if you like, you can ring up Colonel Gowen at the War Office in London. He may be willing to tell you more."

Passing by the other passengers still casting suspicious looks at me, I was taken to the guardroom where I was given breakfast . . . and a sentry to watch me eat it. Knowing that everything would soon be straightened out and delighted to be back on English soil, sniffing at the rain, good old rain, I thoroughly enjoyed the porridge, the regulation sausages, and sweet army tea in thick heavy mugs.

I was just finishing a large slice of bread and marmalade when the security officer arrived, accompanied by two armed men.

"Did you call the War Office?"

"First answer these questions. Who are you, and how did you get on board that aircraft in Gibraltar?"

"I'm a gremlin, I hopped on in mid-Atlantic."

"Now look here!"

"Hang it, man! Did you call Colonel Gowen?"

"Yes, I did call the War Office. Colonel Gowen is unknown there. And now stop all this tomfoolery and talk reasonably."

I could not help laughing. The people in Gibraltar had insisted that I should talk to no one, a car would be waiting for me at Hendon. The officer meeting me would do all that was necessary. Since we had landed in another part of the country I had given the name of Colonel Gowen, but since he was now unknown at the War Office I gathered that I should have stuck to the instructions received in Gibraltar—there were probably reasons for them. Of course if things became really uncomfortable I could always give them my father's telephone number in London. He would soon contact Colonel Gowen or at least the people at Orchard Court. But the chances were that, not seeing me arrive at Hendon, my people would soon find out that I had landed in Cornwall, and I need only be patient.

No doubt about it, I must have looked a fearful blackguard. I could well understand the security officer being suspicious, and it suddenly occurred to me that the only thing he would now have believed would have been if I had suddenly screwed an eyeglass into the side of my face, clicked my heels, bent stiffly forward, and announced myself as Colonel von Schrumpf of the German Secret Service, which thought of course made me laugh again.

Taking this for the nervousness of a man whose plans have been foiled, the security officer asked me if I would mind turning out the contents of my pockets. This I did quite willingly while one of the armed men started poking into my garlic with a safety pin. Explaining that I had specially brought it back from Spain for my brother and his French wife, both of whom loved garlic, would have been quite hopeless.

"That is all, sir," said the corporal who had been searching me.

The security officer looked despondently at the two dirty handkerchiefs which had been put on the table in front of him with a few still dirtier pesetas.

"So, you were in Spain before boarding that aircraft?"

"You deducted that from the Spanish money? Good show."

"Did you search for arms, Corporal?"

"Yes, sir."

"Allow me," I said, unbuttoning my trousers and producing an automatic pistol.

"Where was it?" asked the bewildered corporal.

"In a holster strapped inside the leg. An excellent spot for getting through a search, don't you think?"

This small proof of good will did not, however, influence the security officer in the slightest, and I was marched off to a nearby camp where there was a detention hut.

I could well imagine the sort of message that the young security officer was now putting through to Headquarters, and I grinned at the thought that, back in England at last, I again found myself locked up, this time under suspicion of being a German agent. Lunch came round on a fray, and even though it was only Irish stew and potatoes I enjoyed it—we at least did not make our prisoners fast.

Shortly before teatime the security officer came to fetch me.

"What do you know about Orchard Court?"

"I know it. It is a place I am not supposed to talk about."

"We shall soon see whether you do know it. I am to take you there myself," he said, ostensibly verifying that his revolver was properly loaded.

Our train got in very late indeed, but I was not worried, because I knew that we would always find someone on duty at Orchard Court. When we finally got there I showed my guard the way up. I have a feeling that he was a little disappointed when a minute later he found himself stiffly saluting Colonel Gowen in person.

30

Security and counterespionage were really admirably organized in England during the war. From the security standpoint, we had the obvious advantage of being surrounded by water, therefore rendering clandestine entry or exit from the country extremely difficult and dangerous for those attempting it. Also, we had not the handicap of hundreds of thousands of foreign workers, such as Germany had with its forced labor. Finally, but perhaps most important of all, an agent operating in the British Isles knew that he was really alone against a whole nation, not at all like our agents who, in occupied countries, were often able to consider themselves among allies, occupied perhaps, but still allies.

Our only land frontier, that between Northern and Southern Ireland, did cause us a number of headaches, and, needless to say, the German legation in Dublin was a very important one indeed, and a number of agents certainly operated from there.

Among our lesser though annoying difficulties were our talkative allies, especially the French. True, they only talked about secret matters to bosom friends whom they knew they could thoroughly trust; the trouble was, however, that these bosom friends had bosom friends of their own, equally trustworthy. At other times they simply would not admit that the secret of this or that had the slightest importance, and they did so love to argue the point.

Those who worked on security in London during the war are not likely to forget the shock and consternation that followed the telephone call of an employee of Selfridge's to say that a charming young

French officer had just ordered an immense white flag, explaining to one and all that it was for an expedition about to leave for Dakar! The whole operation was very nearly canceled—a pity it was not, for the whole thing, including the operational details, was a monstrous psychological error from beginning to end. But the security people had already set to work. All those in the department store who had heard or who might have heard the French officer's remarks were brought together, and a security officer told them that the information was indeed true and, in view of the obvious security slip-up, simply begged them not to talk about it. It certainly stopped that leak, though there had of course been dozens of others.

With the press security was based on a system of voluntary discipline. Editors were never obliged to submit articles or pictures to the censors at their disposal, though if they did publish anything dangerous for the security of the people, the armed forces, or the land they were liable to punishment. On the whole this worked out extremely well, and there were very few cases indeed of any serious breach of security by the press. Freedom of speech and opinion remained intact.

In a public house where I happened to be on duty one night, carrying out a security "snoop" for any possible loose talk, I thought I had done well in reporting a docker who, still sober, was explaining to one and all that we were all wrong, that we were fools, that we were fighting on the wrong side, that the Germans were the only people in the world . . . etc., etc. The inquiry which followed showed that the reported man was a steady worker, that he was not in any way affecting the war effort, and that his statements did not constitute a breach of security or endanger any lives. There was therefore no harm in that man expressing his personal opinion, and I was duly rapped over the fingers.

There was, it is true, the famous 18B Regulation which allowed the Government to intern anyone without having to so much as give a reason; the reason or reasons nevertheless had to be extremely serious ones. The Home Office had the last word in such matters and always wanted very detailed and lengthy reports before agreeing to any sort of restraint of a person's liberty. The military authorities had little or no freedom of action, and all counterespionage work other than in the

forces proper had to be done in conjunction with the police and the famous Aliens Department.

Scotland Yard and the Aliens Department formed the nucleus of the counterespionage system in England, one of the most perfect organizations of the war, branching out through the police and the police force to practically every citizen and through Military Intelligence and Field Security Detachments to everyone in the armed forces.

Real counterespionage is very different indeed to that described by the majority of novelists or film producers. Gone are the days (did they ever exist?) when the heroic secret agent simply crept into the enemy's general headquarters, opened the safe, and rushed back to his own side with the detailed plan of attack. Gone are the beautiful vamps with yard-long cigarette holders who cajoled old generals into answering most indiscreet and highly technical questions. Finished are the Mata Haris of the First World War—as a matter of fact, they were finished even then, for it is now known that though Mata Hari was a good dancer she was a very poor spy indeed and never obtained any really worth-while information for anyone! Obtaining information in modern warfare consists mostly of picking up idle talk, small details which, taken separately, are unimportant and hardly to be considered as "secret" and yet, if put aside, collated, and compared with hundreds and sometimes thousands of other minor details, gradually go to make a picture which can on occasion reveal stupendous information. We thus learned many things simply by the studious and careful reading of all papers and magazines published in enemy and enemy-occupied territories.

The main problem of counterespionage was not, therefore, to hunt for people listening to unimportant titbits but rather to locate those who collected and eventually sent out of the country all the "harmless" bits of news. Such people—and there were some—were extremely difficult to catch for the simple reason that they did not move around much or mix with people likely to know military secrets. As to those who gave them the crumbs of news, ninety-nine out of every hundred were perfectly respectable and honest citizens who simply had no idea that they were giving anything away.

Working on counterespionage, which, judged by novels and films

seems thrilling and dangerous, is, in fact, monotonous and frustrating. In wartime it means thousands and thousands of absolutely useless inquiries, quests which have to be followed through to the bitter end . . . just in case. The public must never be discouraged; the main hope of catching an enemy agent is through the public, through someone who, having noticed something unusual, plucks up courage enough to tell the police. Nine times out of ten there is an explanation, a simple one easy to find. In the tenth case the heartbreaking, dreary work starts, and ninety-nine times out of a hundred an explanation or a solution is found and nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand there is no spy. But when on occasion a man does suddenly find himself on the trail of something that looks suspicious and important, then he simply steps aside for the qualified experts to take over!

The great majority of refugees and volunteers coming from abroad understood perfectly well that the stories of all new arrivals had to be examined and gone into carefully, but very few indeed could see any reason why such drastic rules should be applicable to them personally. I remember a very courageous young Frenchman who after crossing the Channel in a small flat-bottomed open boat with, as sole navigating instrument, a miniature compass which he had borrowed from his mother's bracelet and in lieu of a chart, a map torn out of a school geography, had landed on a mined beach in the dead of night, had been fired at by a number of sentries, and by some sort of miracle had arrived unharmed in a coastal village with a Camembert cheese under one arm and a bunch of French papers and magazines under the other. After explaining how he had been machine-gunned in mid-Channel by two Messerschmitts, how a God-sent fog bank had saved him from a German patrol boat evidently sent out to pick him up, he told us that getting over that way could only be done with miraculous luck and that we should be extremely careful with those who did arrive in this fashion for they might well be enemy agents. When a little later it was explained to him that he would not be able to join the Free French Forces immediately but would have to stay a few days in London pending a few investigations, he raved and cursed, unable to understand that his evident *bonne foi* should be doubted a single moment!

These brave men—there were quite a few that somehow managed to cross the Channel—often arrived with no identity papers of any sort, and though at the outset we were less suspicious of them than of others who came with a mass of personal and family documents, they expected us to believe instantly whatever they said. To their way of thinking, the very fact that they had arrived was proof enough of their good faith and patriotism.

The majority of them complained that our questions were useless and even silly; very few realized that it was precisely their answers to apparently pointless and silly questions which enabled us to obtain the proofs we were looking for. As far as we were concerned, the information given us in the questionnaires which they laboriously filled in, concerning their exact identity and domicile, were merely vague points from which we could start searching. For several days after their arrival they met pleasant people ever ready to chat, people who often asked unimportant, aimless questions, or at least so they seemed. For instance, if according to the answers on a questionnaire we found that a man had lived in the same street in a certain town for a number of years, then he should know his neighborhood well enough to react to certain names, certain descriptions, or certain pictures. Quite often we were able to find someone having lived in the same locality; in that case, a simple conversation between the two would soon show whether the new arrival's basic story was true or not.

"But this is idiotic!" exploded a man when asked to write down in their proper order the names of all the Metro stations between the Porte de Saint-Cloud and Strasbourg-Saint-Denis, in Paris. He nevertheless wrote them down correctly, not realizing that had he been unable to do so, he would have become a suspect. He had quite forgotten that in a previous conversation he had claimed to have worked for over fifteen years in a shop in the Faubourg Saint-Denis. Since, according to the first form he had filled in, he lived in a small street close to the Porte de Saint-Cloud, then if his story was true he must have gone to work in the morning and returned home at night by that Metro line and should, therefore, know the names of the nineteen stations which he had passed twice a day for years.

The very few German agents who did come under cover of being French patriots were soon caught. Harder to catch, however, were the

Vichy agents (there were some) whose background stories were of course true. There were, however, numerous other ways of checking a man's story, and if perchance it did not completely satisfy us, we would keep him a few days longer and get people back in France to make the necessary inquiries.

French people arriving in London were generally free to leave Patriotic School eight or ten days later, when we had had time to feel reasonably satisfied that they were bona fide patriots. However, for a number of weeks and sometimes months afterward the Aliens Department kept track of them and knew all about their movements and the people they were frequenting.

Travelers entering or leaving Great Britain during the war had to have excellent reasons indeed for so doing before obtaining the necessary visas, and, needless to say, they were all checked and double-checked from the security standpoint. Since travelers there were, however, this did offer the enemy a possibility of having agents enter and leave the country. The search of luggage belonging to people going abroad had to be as thorough as possible and performed in a minimum of time with a maximum of discretion. To already experienced customs officers were added security and counterespionage specialists. Travelers themselves were also often searched, and in that case it was practically impossible for them to smuggle anything through, no matter how small the object.

A complete search meant being undressed and examined by a medical officer, radiographed for objects which might have been swallowed prior to the search, examined by a dentist who could also radiograph suspicious teeth and, if necessary, tear off crowns or pull out fillings. Specially trained nurses examined bandages, children's napkins, especially the dirty ones, towels, et cetera. Travelers sometimes wondered why nurses painted their arms or legs or other parts of their bodies with a colorless liquid; the reason was that a most interesting message had thus once been "revealed" on the leg of a charming traveler.

Double-bottomed trunks or suitcases, shoes with hollow soles or heels, linings, toilet soaps, toothpaste tubes, beauty creams, umbrella tips or handles, jewels were no longer possible hiding places for even the tiniest of documents. Specially made sunglasses with microphotographic film concealed between two layers of glass (which does not

prevent the wearer from using them and seeing through them properly) was another stratagem used once or twice and discovered like so many others.

For those people who really had to smuggle information, there was only one sure way: learn it by heart. But even the human brain is today no longer an absolutely safe hiding place.

There is no doubt that some agents did get through in spite of all precautions. On one or two occasions we knew perfectly well who they were and why they were coming, and if we let them go again it was simply that they were of greater use to us free than arrested and shot. Some of them were even discreetly helped, and, for one at least, we put on a show that would have made Mike Todd or Cecil B. De Mille green with envy.

Shortly after Dunkirk a trusted German agent was sent to England to get an idea of the real state of our defenses and armament. Being a neutral and holding an important educational function, he came quite officially via Lisbon to study living conditions and difficulties of children and young people in a country suddenly plunged into a state of war. Whereas many travelers had to wait weeks and sometimes months for a visa, he obtained his from the British Consul in Lisbon in less than a week, just the time it took the counterespionage services to organize his trip in England.

When he arrived at London Airport he was treated exactly like all other passengers, but when he finally got through passport control and customs he found a delegation of Boy Scouts waiting for him. Together with the Ministry of Education and the British Red Cross, they had obtained all sorts of facilities for him, and he was able to travel freely all over England. He was even able on one or two occasions to travel by air in order to gain time.

He was much impressed by the considerable number of aircraft, both fighters and bombers, which he saw on the ground or in the air. Also, wherever he went he saw trucks and tanks and guns, and the few ports which he did manage to visit seemed crammed with naval ships of every size and description.

What neither he nor his German masters suspected, however, was that the countless aircraft he kept seeing all over the place were the same bombers and the same fighter wing. He could not possibly have

imagined that the long trainloads of tanks and Bren-carriers which passed or crossed his train—at least three times between London and Sheffield—contained the tanks he had seen that very morning roaring round the corner by his London hotel and that he was to see them yet again in Yorkshire, maneuvering close to a Scout camp to which he had been invited. No more could he have guessed that the destroyers, submarines, and torpedo boats which he had seen riding at anchor in Southampton were those which he was to see again clustered together in Dover three days later.

Delighted with his trip, he returned to Portugal by air. We were confident that his secret report would be very much what we wanted it to be, and we later learned that it had indeed been an excellent report, both precise and objective. It had, therefore, been well worth the colossal fortune in coal, fuel, and petrol and the amount of headaches and work his trip to England had cost us. This agent's report certainly weighed in the balance when Hitler finally decided to postpone his attack on the British Isles.

31

Caruthers was the nearest that Scotland Yard had to anyone that could have fitted into a detective novel. A French journalist to whom he had granted an interview—a most extraordinary and exceptional favor—had been so impressed by his features that he had described him as *l'homme à la mâchoire de fer,* little dreaming that to many he was known as "Old Lockjaw."

Frowning behind his roll-top desk, Caruthers was working. It is only in detective stories that policemen never seem to do any desk work. All the rest of him and his surroundings were, however, faithful to the tradition of the best crime vintage books. His desk was duly littered with books, letters, files, photographs, and newspapers and its pigeonholes properly stuffed with little boxes, newspaper clippings, rolls of paper in elastic bands, and bottles large and small containing liquids, powders, and unidentifiable objects. In the half-open drawer under his elbow were a towel, a cake of soap, and an automatic pistol. On a small table to his left were two telephones and a tray with a teapot and a cup half full of tea.

Caruthers looked a good deal younger than his age, and though his hair was turning silver by his ears his eyebrows were still as black as the rough-hewn pipe clamped in his long aggressive jaw. Few people would have thought him old enough to have seen plenty of war, at close quarters too, over in France in 1916 and 1917. He had joined the Metropolitan Police Force on being demobilized in 1919, and from a beat in Lambeth he had gradually climbed to his present rank of inspector, one of the ablest in the Aliens Department.

One of the telephones hummed, and, still writing with his old-fashioned screw-cap fountain pen, Caruthers picked up the receiver.

"Inspector Caruthers here. Who is calling please?"

He listened to the rapid flow of words at the other end, stopped writing, and jotted down a few words on the back of an envelope.

"Yes, I understand. What time does your program end? . . . Right. Tell her to go back to her seat and wait . . . No, I don't want to talk to her over the phone. We won't be long."

Hanging up the receiver, he pressed one of the three buttons on the side of his desk. A bareheaded policeman appeared at the door.

"Two men and the car. Tell the driver we shall be going to the Hollywood Palace Cinema in South Kensington," said Caruthers quietly, relighting his pipe.

Getting slowly up, he reached for a still damp, heavy mackintosh, struggled into it, finished his cup of tea and made a face because it was cold, slipped the pistol into his pocket, grabbed his hat from a peg, and turned out his light as he walked out of the room.

In the police car speeding along Victoria Street regardless of the blackout and traffic lights reduced to tiny crosses, Caruthers explained:

"The manager of the picture house we are making for phoned to say that one of his customers claims to have recognized in the audience a young German she knew before the war."

"Spy-itis, do you think?"

"May be. We'll see."

The manager who had been waiting for them by the box office took them into his little office while one of the attendants went to fetch the girl who had asked him to call the police.

"Are you quite sure, miss?"

"Quite. It's the same man, I am sure of it!" said the girl excitedly. "We met him in the Black Forest in 1937. He was our guide. He spoke beautiful English."

"What was his name, miss?"

"I did know it, but I've forgotten. We all called him Hans, though."

"We? Who were the others?"

"Members of a hiking group. It was an organized tour. I could easily find two of them, two friends who were with me, if you like."

"We'll see about that later. Meanwhile this man. You are absolutely certain?"

"Absolutely!"

"Right. Now, listen, miss. One of my men is going back with you, and you will discreetly show him this man. You will then return to your seat and stay there until the suspect leaves. Don't let him see you, but get up after him and follow him out, and when he passes in front of me in the lobby call him by his name, as though you had just then recognized him. Do you think you can do that?"

"Yes, of course."

"Right. Away you go then."

The detective who had accompanied the girl back to her seat came out again five minutes later.

"A tall, fair-haired, good-looking young man. She'll probably feel damn silly when she finds the only forest he knows is Epping Forest."

Twenty minutes later the film came to an end with a blare of music, followed a moment later by "God Save the King." Caruthers would have preferred the man to come out alone; he hated finding himself in the middle of a crowd in case of trouble. The first few spectators of the back rows walked out rapidly, then more slowly came a flow of people, talking and struggling into hats and coats.

Caruthers saw his assistant fix his gaze on a tall young man, and a little behind he saw the pale face of the girl he had talked to. The blond man was about to light a cigarette and had almost reached his level.

"Oh, Hans!" called the girl in a sharp, clear voice.

. . . And Hans turned round as two men closed in on him. Before even saying a word Caruthers' hands had run over his coat, and a second later he had relieved him of a small revolver.

Hans was hanged.

32

The band was playing a selection from *Faust*. Carrying heavy circular trays, the Corner House waitresses were moving silently among the diners, deftly dodging patient customers on the lookout for free tables. Now and again the roar of the guns in Hyde Park would hush the hum of conversations but not the music which would then seem a little louder, and, shrugging or smiling, people would go on eating and talking.

To be back in that extraordinary atmosphere of London of the blitz after that, so different, of occupied France was always a strangely thrilling sensation. Life in London was never shocked or paralyzed as it seemed to be during air raids in towns on the Continent. Londoners were not only taking it well but taking it as though there was nothing so very extraordinary about getting bombed night after night. Perhaps it was the relief of the nervous strain which one can never shake off in enemy-occupied territory, but Londoners seemed so homely after the French, who are witty, charming, pleasant, lovable even—but somehow not homely-looking people, people you feel you know, who, without troubling to get up, will make room for you by the fire. Yes, even in the Marble Arch Corner House, even though many of them were in uniform, they looked homely and happy to be there, enjoying food that could have been so much better cooked the other side of the Channel.

Sitting alone at a small table, glancing at an evening paper, the touch and smell of which was so pleasant to find again, listening very vaguely to the musicians grinding out Gounod's *Faust*, the sort of

music that seems to have been specially written for a background accompaniment of spoons, knives, and forks on cups, saucers, and plates, I was wondering what some of them would have said, had they known that at three o'clock that morning I was still in France. I could well imagine the old lady at the table facing mine simply saying: "How nice!" And the bewhiskered, bald-headed old man farther on saying: "Jolly good show, that! Are the Folies still open?"

Then my eyes wandered to the sailor whose back was turned my way but who was eating with a prodigious appetite, judging by the way his ears were wagging up and down. Where had I seen ears moving up and down like that before? Had it been a man eating or talking, I wondered? Where? In some port perhaps? Was it the same man? The sailor's face would mean nothing, I supposed—in any case, I knew no sailor. Looking the other way, I tried to think of something else, knowing full well that those wagging ears were going to haunt me all evening. There is nothing more annoying than trying to remember something which is not forgotten, which one knows, which is just out of the brain's reach, in some memory nook that can't be found. I have often had that impression, that sudden feeling that it has all happened before, when finding myself in strange places, in certain streets or rooms. I know full well that in most cases it is merely a trick of the brain, which has just registered a picture, a word, a sensation but gives the impression that it was long ago instead of a mere fraction of a second before. Still I could not shake off the feeling that I had seen those or similar ears somewhere else.

Gazing at the pointed ears that were moving up and down each side of the rather high round head, I tried to associate them with something else that might have happened at the same time, such as the lapping of the sea against a ship's side, or the rhythmic rumbling of its engines . . . or even a braying donkey. All I could think of was a gold X, a letter X which the eater's right ear partly concealed each time he chewed. What could that letter mean? I remembered that I had asked myself that question before . . . Yes, I had moved aside to see—— And in a flash I knew! It was the word FIX, three large gilt letters under a golden armor, a publicity placard for a French make of gold-plated jewelry. That publicity placard I had seen on one of the sides of a newspaper kiosk outside the Saint-Lazare station in

Paris; I had seen it from the table where I had had lunch in the small restaurant facing the station. I had not seen the man come in, but later, while sipping a cup of black barley juice in lieu of coffee, I had seen and been amused by the funny wagging ears.

Since the English sailor could not have been lunching the day before in Paris, it must have been a man whose ears were the same. Besides, I remembered the man quite clearly now—I had glanced at him on walking out, and he had a mustache, and a sailor with a mustache simply did not exist in the British Navy. But those ears worried me. I could have sworn that they were the same.

Slipping sixpence under the edge of my plate, I struggled into my greatcoat, picked up my bill, and walked round by the platform where the band was hacking its way through a frenzied *Rienzi*. Passing close to the sailor, I felt reassured at seeing that he had no mustache and a moment later found myself moving on, trying to appear unconcerned! He had no mustache, but he had the very same scar—I remembered it now—running from the corner of his mouth to his nostril. It was the same man! I vainly tried to reason it out. An English sailor could conceivably have had a mustache the day before, but he could not possibly have been eating lunch in Paris. As far as I knew, I had been the only man picked up in France less than eighteen hours ago. Of course I could not swear to that . . . but, it was the same man! Either there had been another pickup and that sailor was one of us, or . . .

There was only one exit by the cash desk. Picking up my change, I stopped by the man in uniform opening the door for departing clients.

"Listen . . . I am an intelligence officer," I said as quietly as I could. "See that sailor sitting at the . . . let me see . . . one, two, three . . . fourth table from the end of the central alley?"

"Yes, sir."

"That man must under no condition be allowed to leave this place before I get back. I won't be more than a minute or two, but if he tries to leave, delay him somehow . . . fight him if you must. I'll take full responsibility."

"Right you are, sir," said the doorman as smoothly as if I had merely asked him to keep my cap for a few minutes.

Convincing a policeman to come and guard the door while I dashed

to a telephone proved much more difficult. He finally agreed to telephone while I went back.

Less than five minutes later the policeman pointed me out to two detectives.

"Right. Let's have a look at him," said the eldest of the two men after I had told them my story. "You are quite sure, aren't you? . . . Right. Because, if you care to know, there was only one trip this way last night, and since you were the passenger it can hardly be the other man, can it?"

He sauntered off as though he was looking for someone, while the other detective stayed with me by the door.

"Good show. Thank you very much," he said, coming back two minutes later.

"Are you going to arrest him?"

"No. I think we know him, and we can pick him up almost any time. We'll stick to him for a little while at least. He might lead us to something still more interesting. Thanks again . . . Good night."

The end of that story? I was never told.

33

"What is a snowy owl?"

"Haven't the faintest, old man. Why?"

"Its eggs are worth quite a lot, judging by this," said the censor, reading the first of a packet of letters which he had just opened by rubbing them on a sheet of emery paper. "I have a man here proposing to exchange some for trucks, of all things."

That was the beginning of an affair which, in most other countries at war, would have been rapidly solved and sanctioned by at least one execution. In England it officially remained a mystery, and there was no execution.

The letter which the censors had opened had arrived from a neutral country and was addressed to a wealthy Norwegian shipowner who had a thriving business in one of our North Sea ports.

Although Mr. Jungsen was a Norwegian by birth he had lived most of his life in England, and his wife was English. He owned a number of cargo boats which had now been taken over by the government and a whole flotilla of fishing boats which had not been touched and which were more often out fishing in the North Sea than in port. However, since on several occasions and in spite of repeated warnings his boats had used their wireless outside of specified times, all radio equipment had been taken off Mr. Jungsen's boats and impounded.

The day after the letter about the snowy owls had been opened by the postal censors a special conference had been called in the office of Colonel King, Port Security Officer. A lawyer by profession, King

knew all the local ship brokers and shipowners, most of whom had had dealings with him at some time or other.

"What do you think of it all?" asked Colonel King.

"I think that the usual sort of inquiry will last weeks and perhaps months and that we won't get anywhere," answered one of the regional security officers at the table. "Jungsen is a very influential man; therefore, in view of all the past reports I would suggest we act in some way or other right away. Since he is not a British subject I think we might perhaps see about having his movements restricted to some inland area."

"I cannot say we would be terribly unhappy at seeing him out of the way," said the local representative of the Aliens Department. "We have nothing definite against him, mind you. He's just one of those funny sort of people that we feel we have to watch perhaps a little closer than most."

Regional Security and Port Security both had files about Mr. Jungsen but with nothing of any importance in them. A good deal of talk about him, reports on some of the things he had said, and about one or two incidents at the local country club. Jungsen had never concealed his pro-Nazi feelings, and before the war he had always spent his summer holidays in Germany. The local German consul had been one of his best friends. The only tangible point was the fact that the Navy had impounded the wireless transmitters of his fishing boats. However, the Naval Security Officer assured us that the fact that he had, or rather that his skippers had, broken radio silence without any reasonable excuse a number of times was not of sufficient importance for us to hope to make a case against Jungsen out of it.

As to the letter about the snowy owls, the code expert had as usual told us what we had all guessed, namely, that unless it had been written by a lunatic it had a definite meaning. He added that no code of any sort had otherwise been detected in it.

"If we start an inquiry I am almost certain that Jungsen will get to hear about it," said Colonel King. "I know the man well; if he is guilty and thinks that we suspect him, he will take all necessary precautions, and we shall get nowhere."

"What do you propose doing then, sir?"

"The one thing he would never expect us to do: come down on him

like a ton of bricks right away, today. If he is guilty we stand a chance that he will lose his head and make some slip or other, because he will feel certain that our visit means that we have been watching him closely for weeks and perhaps months without his knowing it and that we have far more against him than is really the case."

"And what if he should be innocent?"

"Then he will have no qualms and no trouble in explaining what this letter means."

On top of a rise facing the sea, Jungsen's villa was one of the finest modern houses in that region. From the three windows of his long drawing room and from that of his bedroom above, Jungsen could watch his ships leaving and arriving.

Small and delicate, Mrs. Jungsen herself answered the door.

"You . . . you've come to arrest him!" she gasped, going very white.

"What makes you say that, Mrs. Jungsen?" I asked, walking in followed by four of my men.

"My husband will be back for dinner. Can't you wait for him, please?"

"Certainly. We shall wait with you, though, if you please."

Colonel King, whom Mrs. Jungsen had not yet recognized in his khaki uniform, went to the telephone, while two wireless experts went exploring the top floors and the loft, just in case of something interesting.

Olaf Jungsen jumped, then went very red when I answered his own front door ten minutes later. Without asking who I was or what I was doing there, he walked straight into the drawing room and looked long and steadily at his wife.

"No, Jungsen, she did not speak. She did not say anything," said Colonel King softly. "Can you, however, tell us what you intended doing with that enormous German flag which we found rolled up in your loft? Also, can you tell us under what circumstances you were given that signed portrait of Hitler, there on the grand piano?"

"We are all free, are we not? I like the German system, that is well known. It is not a punishable crime, is it?"

"Quite true, it is not; we are not in Germany."

"Is that all you wanted to know?" asked Jungsen, pouring himself out a glass of rum.

"No, Jungsen. We have come about something much more serious. Will you kindly turn out your pockets."

"Have you a warrant?" asked the Norwegian, slowly emptying his pockets on the table in front of Colonel King.

"We also are interested in snowy owls and their eggs, Jungsen," said Colonel King, turning over the pages of a small diary which the Norwegian had thrown onto the table with his keys and wallet.

"I don't know what you are talking about," said Jungsen very slowly, his eyes half closed as though he were suddenly very sleepy, but turned toward his wife.

Evidently convinced that his wife had said something, he was foolishly giving himself away. Then I saw his jaw lock and his eyes narrow still more when King pulled some eight or ten snapshots out of his wallet.

In silence, feeling by the tension in the air that he had made an important find, Colonel King examined the photos carefully, one by one.

"Can you explain these two?" he asked, showing them rapidly to Jungsen before passing them on to us.

Looking rather like Leica enlargements, they showed three men at sea on a rubber dinghy. They had been taken from the deck of a ship approaching them. In one of the pictures one of the men in the dinghy was waving and smiling.

Jungsen explained that someone at the club—he did not just then remember who—had shown him the pictures two or three days before and he had somehow swept them up among his own snapshots. He was not sure but rather thought that they had been taken during some tests.

At the request of Colonel King I telephoned to the R.A.F. local security officer and, in total silence, with Jungsen marching slowly up and down, we waited for him. He arrived at last, glanced at the pictures, took a large magnifying glass out of his pocket, and examined them in detail for a good five minutes.

"Absolutely no doubt," he said at last, looking up. "Those are three members of the crew of one of our bombers reported lost ten days ago, and we have had no news since."

"What have you to say to that, Jungsen?"

"All this is ridiculous. I told you already, I think those pictures were taken during tests. I cannot help it if they disappear after, can I?"

"Those pictures were taken after that aircraft failed to return, therefore after it had come down in the sea somewhere," said the R.A.F. officer quietly, and again Jungsen looked very tired.

"How can you tell?" he shrugged.

"Look, even without the magnifying glass it is quite easy to see the last two numbers painted on the side of the dinghy."

"Yes, I can see a three and a seven," I said, leaning over his shoulder.

"That's right. On their last flight out they were given new rescue equipment, and the number of the dinghy was six hundred and thirty-seven. Also, here are the regular identity shots of the crew of that bomber. You see, it is quite easy to recognize three of them, especially the one that is smiling and waving."

"And you know why he was smiling, don't you, Jungsen?" added Colonel King, leaning forward. "It is because the boat approaching, the one from which this photo was taken, was a friendly boat, an English boat. Jungsen, do you think it might perhaps have been a fishing boat?"

"This is all too ridiculous for words," said Jungsen, picking up his handkerchief from the table and wiping his neck and face with it.

"Is it? Tell me, returning to snowy owls for a moment, was not one of your boats called the Snowy Owl, before the war?"

"No . . . Perhaps . . . I . . . I don't remember, really."

By two in the morning Jungsen was weakening. We were still talking to him, walking round him, sitting round him, leaving him no respite, taking turns at shooting questions.

Very white, biting his mustache, the R.A.F. officer, who seemed convinced that the three airmen on the pictures had been either turned over to the enemy at some mysterious rendezvous out in the North Sea or simply and coolly murdered, was the most aggressive, firing questions as fast as Jungsen was answering them, sometimes not even waiting for an answer if it did not come immediately, gradually forcing the Norwegian to adopt his tempo of question and answer.

"Suppose we ask Mrs. Jungsen a few questions, now," suggested

Colonel King when, for the hundredth time, we had asked him who exactly had given him those snapshots found in his wallet.

"It is no use asking my wife anything at all. She knows nothing!" shouted Jungsen, ripping off his collar.

"Then there is something to know," said the R.A.F. man, getting up. "Let's start all over again."

I thought that Jungsen was going to cry, but it was then that the London specialists arrived, bringing with them all the rules of the game which we had not strictly observed. We had rather forgotten that it is not allowed to question a man for hours on end without giving him time to rest, and to feed him if he feels hungry. In other words, Jungsen was saved.

In any other country the truth would have been wormed out of him that very night, perhaps the very next minute; he would then have been tried and probably sentenced to death and executed.

Olaf Jungsen was finally interned in the Isle of Man. If he is still alive I have little doubt that he is again a rich and influential man.

34

He walked into the police station one night.

He was a docker and lived with his mother in a small narrow house of bricks that had once been red, judging by the scars made by flying debris when a bomb had fallen plump on the railway line at the back. It was merely one of a row of narrow houses facing an identical row of narrow houses across a narrow street, which street was but one of many similar streets monotonously parallel and filling up all the space between the docks and the railway line. Each narrow house had behind it a narrow rectangle of brown dust in summer, brown mud in winter, pompously called a garden but in which only clotheslines poles seemed to grow. He was one of the very few who had not built himself an Anderson shelter; he had no use for it, because his mother was an invalid and could not, must not, be moved from her bed in the front room.

For several nights running, during the raids, he and his mother had heard strange noises in the house next door and more especially a funny noise which he seemed to think might be that of a wireless transmitter. Since the house next door was empty he had thought it best to look in and tell the police about it.

"His story seems sort of reasonable, sir, so I thought I'd ask him to wait, since I knew you was coming round this evening."

Perpetually rolling up his greasy cap like some precious parchment, he repeated his story.

"Have you told any of your neighbors about this?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know if anyone else in your street noticed anything suspicious, or heard similar noises?"

"Mother and me, that's all, sir. All the others get in their shelters when the buzzers start. We're right close to the docks, you see. Mother can't budge, so I sit with her. It's not that she's so very ill, but her heart is fearful weak, and she mustn't ever leave her bed or it might go pop, the doctor says."

"Have you or your mother ever seen anyone entering or leaving the house next door at other times, during the day, for instance?"

"No, sir. I told you, it's empty."

"Right. The very first thing to do is to keep this quiet, and you had better tell your mother not to talk about it to any of your neighbors. Now, listen carefully. If there is an air raid and you hear those strange noises again, slip out and go as far as the wardens' post at the end of your street. They will be expecting you and will put you through to me on their telephone line. All right?"

"Yes, sir, right."

The local wardens confirmed the fact that he and his mother were the only people in the street who did not leave their house during raids. They also confirmed that the house next door had been uninhabited for some months.

Although our offices had been reinforced by heavy timber beams and rafters and the doors and windows protected by brick walls, I was in a blue funk that night when the bombs started coming down in the neighborhood, rocking and shaking the whole building at every explosion. It was close to midnight when the telephone rang.

"Man, you shouldn't have gone out under that!"

"Oh, it's all right, I ran all the way. We can hear it well tonight; can you come round?"

"I'll be round at your place in about ten minutes."

"No, come to the wardens' shelter. I'll wait for you and lead you round by the back. Making a noise round by the front door will only attract attention, see what I mean? And it might also be a good idea if you had some rubber shoes or something."

"All right. I won't be long."

No fool, that lad, I thought as I struggled into a pair of rubber sea boots which we used for motorcycling in wet weather. I checked that

my torch and pistol were in working order, tightened the chin strap of my steel helmet, and ran out to my motor bike.

A great fire somewhere down by the port gave sufficient light for the ambulances and fire engines to speed along the wet empty streets. Overhead, in the throbbing blackness, like the legs of some fantastic spider, searchlight beams clustered round a tiny silver brooch in the shape of an airplane surrounded by bright sparks, where the anti-aircraft shells were bursting.

My friend was waiting patiently by the entrance to the wardens' shelter. Two minutes later we were trudging along by the railway line which passed at the back of his house. Pushing aside a plank in a palisade, he passed through and I followed, feeling a little like a schoolboy on a lark. We tiptoed to a door which he opened and closed softly after us. By the light of my torch I saw that we were in a small kitchen.

"My mother is very ill," whispered my guide, "but if she asks tell her she looks fine. Doctor doesn't want her to know how bad she really is, see?"

"Yes, I see."

"That you, Fred?" The voice came high and squeaky, from behind a black painted door.

"Yes, Ma. The officer has come with me. Can we come in?"

My guide pushed open the black door, and I caught my breath in the unexpected smell of incense and ether that seemed to swirl round; yet another smell that seeped gradually through and reminded me of mysterious bubbles coming slowly up out of mud flats made me clench my teeth when I identified it as the sweet nauseating smell of rotting flesh, the smell of death.

In the far corner of the overheated room, only vaguely illuminated by an old-fashioned petrol lamp of green glass and twisted brass on an imitation-marble stand, reclining on a mountain of gaily colored embroidered silk and velvet cushions, enormous and incredibly flabby, was Fred's mother. Never before had I seen such a fat woman. A Chinese embroidered gown that would certainly have fetched a very high price at Liberty's in London only partly covered great rolls of soft, hairless, shiny skin that seemed full of liquid fat. It was difficult to see by the light of the petrol lamp, but I had the impression that

she was quite deformed, with a tremendous hump on one shoulder and no neck at all. Her head seemed to be level with her enormous breasts that expanded and sank rhythmically as her breath, something between a sigh and a whistle, came out of the minute, ridiculously purple-painted mouth in a mass of white powdered skin out of which bulged two large yellowish eyes. Somewhat like fish eyes, they never blinked and moved very little, yet seemed never to leave me. She wheezed like a clock about to strike.

"Put the kettle on the fire and make us some tea, Fred. Excuse me if I don't get up to receive you proper-like, sir, but as you can see for yourself I'm ill, very ill, much iller than I look."

"I am sorry to disturb you, madame," I mumbled, fascinated by the ostrich feather stuck in the bun of yellowish hair at the back of her head and that wagged and trembled when she spoke.

"Are they still at it, Ma?" whispered her son.

"No, not just now. They moved around a lot; there was at least two of them."

"There, sir, listen. You will hear every little movement with this," said Fred, putting the end of a brass curtain rod against the wall and showing me how to put my ear to the other end.

"You are right, madame. It is all quiet now," I said, listening and looking round the room.

Fred had evidently been a sailor before becoming a docker. Every imaginable cheap oriental souvenir, the sort of thing that only sailors buy and which, I am certain, are manufactured exclusively for sailors, decorated the room. The walls were draped with embroidered silk banners, and Chinese paper lanterns hung from the ceiling, which the fire and the smoking petrol lamp had long ago turned black. By the front door a moth-eaten stuffed monkey seemed to envy a great porcelain parrot. Over the mantelpiece a scimitar was crossed with an elephant tusk, and on the shelf covered in green velvet with a gold fringe was a dusty but brand-new opium pipe, a hollow ivory ball containing other ivory balls, the three wise monkeys who see no harm, hear no harm, and speak no harm (which, by the way, would tend to prove that evolution should be man-to-monkey and not as Darwin suggested), the usual chain of elephants carved out of the same chunk of fake ivory, painted boxes, varnished sea shells, and a perpetual cal-

endar that worked by pulling silk ribbons under a brightly colored view of Hong Kong. The only really interesting object in the room was the large sailor's massive iron-bound chest with its two locks and large brass studs.

"That's my collection of stereoscopic views," said Fred, who had followed my gaze. "Ma loves looking at 'em, but it gets very tiring, because she is too weak to hold the machine and I have to hold it for her, and if I move ever so little she can't see proper-like."

The guns had ceased, and though the all clear had not yet sounded all was quiet. I had carefully questioned the old lady and her son, sipped some China tea that was really good, and although we had heard nothing next door I had at last left them convinced that there was indeed something mysterious going on in the next house.

On making a few inquiries the next day, I found that Fred had indeed been a sailor before the war; back from one of his long voyages, he had found his mother paralyzed and had decided to stay ashore to take care of her. He looked after the house, did the cooking, ran the errands, attended her like a professional nurse, and since their house was not very far from the docks where he worked, he generally managed to run home at least once during the day to see if she was all right and whether she needed anything. The agent who had the difficult task of collecting rents in that neighborhood confirmed that Fred's neighbors had left seven months ago. He explained that they had not, however, vacated the house and that regularly at the beginning of each month he received a postal order from them for the rent. No, he did not know where they had gone to, somewhere inland, probably, where the children would be safer from raids.

A check at the post office showed that the money orders had come from a number of different places in England, though the last two had been sent from Sheffield. The police knew nothing about the Browns, but an inquiry was started, since it seemed strange that people living in such a poor neighborhood should be able to afford what amounted to a useless rent and also to travel from place to place.

The empty house was discreetly watched, and since it had a back garden just like every other house, for several days workmen went up and down that particular part of the railway line, checking the sleepers and shoveling the ballast around. However, no one had been seen

entering or leaving the house. Fred had twice telephoned me during raids, but each time I had arrived too late when all was again quiet.

Whether my reports happened to coincide with some other information or whether it was simply their restrained enthusiasm, I do not know, but for once Counterespionage seemed quite interested, and I was repeatedly told not to rush things, that catching one or two suspects was good enough but that far better would be to lay hands on a complete organization.

For almost three weeks during which I was never able to get used to the sickly smell of decay that emanated in waves from the living corpse in the corner of the room, I spent long hours taking turns at listening. Fred's mother either never slept or slept in the daytime, for whenever I happened to look her way her bright fish eyes seemed to be fixed on me. After long hours of waiting in vain for a single sound I would get drowsy and start nodding, but if I forced my eyes open I was sure to find hers watching me. She gave me nightmares. Once I dreamed she was in an aquarium, a sort of monstrous siren-witch, blowing yellowish bubbles out of her little purple mouth; another time I dreamed that Fred was feeding her with little pieces of skin which he had cut out of the back of my neck!

One night at last my patience was rewarded. I distinctly heard something; someone was moving in the house next door. Someone was therefore living there in hiding, since we were quite sure that no one had entered or left it during the last fortnight!

I was putting the last touches to my report the following morning when Fred telephoned.

"Look, sir, it's now or never! Come quick. They're holding a meeting next door. There's at least six of 'em!"

"Did you see them arrive?"

"No, but we can hear them, all right, ever so clear. Come quick as you can . . . round the back as usual."

Fred's street was blocked at both ends, and we posted men along the railway line. I had dragged Inspector Jones out of bed and explained to him what was happening and that I thought the time had come for action.

"Well, you know the place. Lead on," he said when I lifted the plank to let him through into Fred's back garden.

I had never seen Fred's mother by daylight. She was even more ghastly; yes, without a doubt some of the fat under her skin was turning green, and I felt sick. Fred was prancing around excitedly.

"Come in, come in!" he whispered. "There, listen! They're talking aloud!" he added, putting his ear to the other wall, directly opposite the wall by which we had been listening for weeks!

"But, Fred . . . they are . . . surely, the other side!"

"Not now! Last night they dug a tunnel. Yes, cheeky devils, aren't they, a tunnel right under our house, and now they're all next door!"

Inspector Jones looked at me, and there was a strange twinkle in his eye.

Without saying anything I opened the front door and found myself face to face with a man carrying a black bag, just about to knock.

"Come in. Who are you?"

"I am the doctor. Is anything wrong? Oh, hello, Inspector. I see, I see . . . Will you kindly wait for me outside? I want to talk to you after attending to this lady. I come to see her every morning, you know."

A few minutes later he joined us at the end of the street.

"Your inquiry is over," he said with a grin. "Why on earth didn't you come to see me before launching out on this crazy adventure? That poor boy is insane. I simply cannot understand why the neighbors didn't warn you about them. They are not at all dangerous, but he and his mother both suffer from a persecution mania. I have been treating them for years."

I did not consider worth-while explaining that it was I, who in the first place had carefully avoided the neighbors. In spite of all the doctor said, in spite of the fact that we had that morning found them listening to the opposite wall, in spite of their story about the strange men having dug a tunnel under their house during the night, Fred had been so strangely convincing that, later that day, I had one of my men enter and visit the empty house.

"Plenty of rats but nothing else," he reported laconically.

35

"There it is at last. Who wants it?" asked Doctor Marsden, extending his hand over the card table.

The four bridge players leaned forward.

"What a disgusting-looking pill," said one of them. "You might have given it some other color while you were about it."

"It is rather repulsive," said another, squinting at the small green pill in the middle of the doctor's open palm.

"No volunteer, then? Tell you what, boys, draw for it. Jim, shuffle those cards by you and deal them face up. Ace of spades wins."

"Good idea," said Jim, picking up the pack of cards.

The third time round he turned up the ace of spades for himself.

"My luck at cards is something extraordinary," he said with a grin. "Well, Doc, how am I supposed to take it?"

"It should be quite tasteless in beer or coffee, in which it should dissolve as easily as sugar, and it should put you to sleep in less than thirty minutes."

"And how long will I sleep?"

"Several hours, probably eight or ten."

"And after? Fresh as a daisy?"

"N . . . no, not exactly; perhaps a little headache with a morning-after feeling."

It is only in films and novels that secret agents have wonderful tasteless and odorless drugs that will put any amount of people instantly to sleep. It is quite extraordinary the way films and novels, but more especially films, are always so far from the real thing, which,

For months Doctor Marsden had been trying to meet the requirements of the Intelligence Service, who wanted some clean and compact little drug that could put people to sleep rapidly and without danger. The best we had at that time was a long glass tube wrapped in cotton wool; when broken under someone's nose and kept there for a few seconds, it put people to sleep for a few minutes. The trouble with them was that they were not easy to conceal though very easy to break accidentally, and also that breaking them and keeping them under people's noses necessitated a commando technique not exactly suitable where and when the operator wanted to pass unnoticed. Finally, they were quite hopeless when used on bewhiskered generals or bearded diplomats, not because the victims were generals or diplomats, but simply because of the whiskers, which, if at all bushy, considerably attenuate the effect of the gaseous mixture.

Many people led mysterious lives or performed secret and extraordinary jobs during the war, but the strangest of all were perhaps those four bridge players who lived a lazy country-club life when not working and sometimes even when working; it all depended on the job on hand. They were voluntary guinea pigs for all scientific research connected with the armed services.

The American and British soldiers that landed on the Normandy beaches in June 1944 all had special underwear which was to protect them from the first effects of liquid gas, should the Germans decide to use it. Of course it had not been necessary to put men into them to test their resistance to liquid gas, but they had been judged very warm indeed, and since those wearing them were likely to have to wear them for long periods of time, perhaps even days without taking them off, they were first handed over to the "Guinea-Pig Department."

For a whole fortnight, without ever undressing, two volunteer guinea pigs lived and slept in this special underwear; and so that conditions would be as near as possible those which the soldiers would encounter they were made to walk miles with full military equipment, to wade and swim across rivers, to sleep in fields without even a blanket, and to eat iron rations and very little else.

"It gave me an itch which was at first quite unbearable," explained

Jim one evening when telling me about his work. "Also, in the end it got rather sticky, and mine finally had to be peeled off. But it was not nearly so unpleasant as the experiments we underwent on human resistance to cold!"

It had been finally decided that Jim would take his pill in his coffee after dinner that evening.

He dropped it himself into his cup, stirred it with the sugar, and drank it off.

"Come into the drawing room," said Marsden. "You are going to feel very drowsy in about ten minutes' time. I want you to resist the desire to sleep as long as you possibly can."

"Sure you gave me the right stuff," said Jim, grinning, half an hour later as Marsden took his pulse.

"Try walking up and down a little. That should help it get into your system."

"Wonderful, Doctor, you will have to deliver a skipping rope with it," said Jim, walking round the room. "Suppose, instead, we have a rubber of bridge. Maybe tickling the gray matter will help your pill do its job."

"Yes, try," said Marsden, disappointed.

By one in the morning Jim was collecting a handful of coppers from his three partners and laughing gaily at Marsden, who was blinking and gaping by the fire, where he had finally fallen asleep.

Next morning as usual Jim was first in the bathroom, where, also as usual, he sang at the top of his voice.

"Pity you didn't invent a pill for tightening the windpipe of all bathroom tenors," said one of the guinea pigs, waiting outside the bathroom door when Doctor Marsden passed by.

"Maybe coffee has a neutralizing effect," said Marsden thoughtfully. "We'll try it in beer next."

"Yes, Doc, but not before Monday, please," said Jim, coming out at last. "We've got the weekend off, and we're all going up to town together . . . and you would not want to spoil our outing, would you, dear Doctor?"

"No, Monday will do."

The four guniea pigs had become inseparable friends. Accompanied by four charming young ladies—Jim's sister and three of her friends

—they had finally arrived at the Savoy, where, in spite of restrictions, it was still possible to enjoy a reasonably good lunch in pleasant surroundings. It was quite a gay party, and various plans for the weekend were still being discussed by the time coffee was being served.

"If you want to see that film this afternoon, then for goodness' sake hurry up. I hate arriving halfway through a film," said Jim, tossing off his coffee and calling for the bill.

He got up, leaned over the table to light one of the girls' cigarettes, stepped sideways, grinned, and collapsed in a dead faint.

Waiters rushed round while the musicians went on playing "Rêve de Valse."

"Better call the doctor," said the headwaiter.

"No, it's nothing really. All he needs is a bed. He'll wake up tonight or tomorrow," said one of his companions.

"Marsden's little Sleeping Beauty has certainly taken her time," said another, laughing. "But maybe we had better tell him about it."

"Allow me," said a small white-haired man with spectacles. "I am the hotel doctor."

"Oh, it's quite all right, Doctor. Jim will come to sooner or later."

"I hope so, young man. Waiter, call an ambulance and the police. This man has been drugged and perhaps poisoned!"

"No, only drugged. Let me explain. You see . . . Jim is a guinea pig . . ."

"You can explain all that to the police. Do you know what he was drugged with?"

"No, I'm sorry. Some sort of green pill Marsden invented."

The police had never heard of the "Guinea-Pig Department" and therefore refused to believe Jim's friends. The result was that while poor Jim was having his stomach washed out at the Charing Cross Hospital his friends and their girl friends were being detained. When they finally convinced a detective sergeant to start telephoning around, Doctor Marsden had also left for the weekend.

It was only on the following afternoon that, still groggy, Jim was able to tell the same story and then to get hold of a friend of his at the War Office. He came round to deliver his friends just in time for them to say good-by to the girls and dash for the last train back to the country for more "fun and games."

36

Throughout the First World War and up until 1942 in the second, the main centers for the selling, or exchange, or stealing, or giving away of secrets had been Geneva, Madrid, and Lisbon. After the North Africa landings in November 1942 in a matter of weeks Algiers became a world center for secret agents from practically all over the world. Dozens of official and unofficial information services clustered there. In this snake pit of whispered secrets every intelligence service not only plotted and schemed and struggled to obtain information but put up a perpetual fight to defend and keep its own secrets. The hash of ideals and political tendencies was such that in some of the services men were to be found working almost openly against each other and even sometimes working for the enemy. The French were perhaps a little more confused and bewildered than most, because over and above these countless problems and tendencies they had their own internal political tendencies and struggles, which in those days ranged from communists to royalists (who, at the time of Darlan's death, really thought they had a chance of putting the Count of Paris back on the throne of France).

When I landed to join the throng of nosey-parker-intelligence-worms, after a ten-day convoy trip from Liverpool, Algiers was all in one a paradise, a purgatory, and a hell for secret-service men and agents, some of whom seemed to work for an amazing number of different bosses. The French alone had at least three different security or intelligence services occasionally fighting the enemy but always fighting each other with no holds barred. Apart from the very official

Anglo-American Psychological Warfare Branch, the Americans and British each had their services. The only one that did any real work was the one that had no money and never seemed to be doing anything, the British Secret Service, of course.

Those with the most money and the least experience, ready to believe anything and anyone at first but learning fast, were the Americans who operated both officially and unofficially from the Hotel Cornouailles, the Headquarters of Psychological Warfare Branch to which I was attached.

The Hotel Cornouailles was under the orders of a cavalry colonel, a real Southern gentleman, a first-class soldier and a rotten psychologist. A famous humorist who later won a Pulitzer Prize—for apart from soldiers and second-rate film magnates who had accepted to join the war effort for a dollar a year (just about what they were worth), P.W.B. included well-known writers and journalists—once explained to me that the only reason the dear Southern colonel had been put in charge of Psychological Warfare was that he had got so bandy-legged riding horses that for modern warfare it would have been quite impossible to get him inside a tank turret. A soldier, especially a professional soldier who was still at the stage of blowing bugles, waving flags, and showing rows of shiny medals on the bulging chests of men about to charge as the one sure way of sapping enemy morale, was not exactly the sort of man that should perhaps have been in charge of Psychological Warfare. However, since he had civilians in his outfit, everything very soon panned out all right, for, as is well known, give a civilian time and he will talk a soldier out of anything. We finally arrived at a *modus vivendi* where, though still officially in charge, the colonel was relieved of all psychology and relegated to looking after our material comforts. Thus Psychological Warfare gradually came under the orders of a civilian or rather a number of civilians, because there again one or two who thought they were in charge never quite realized that the one real brain of the outfit was that of a very charming man called C. D. Jackson, who was greatly admired by all the little Arab boys round the hotel who thought his first name was Sidi. While other top-ranking P.W.B. men went chasing around after beautiful Canadian girls (P.W.B. also boasted a female staff) or chewed fat cigars dreaming of technicolor productions, C. D. Jackson was one

of the few who really understood what was going on in North Africa and who did anything really useful. The other few were mostly old and experienced American newspapermen, who had been European bureau chiefs before the war and who had been roped into P.W.B. One or two had come straight out from Washington, but most of the others had been in England some time.

Though men fought and squabbled in the British and American services, they were always to be found shoulder to shoulder whenever it came to facing the enemy. The same could not be said of the three or four different French intelligence and counterespionage services where almost each man was a complete political party of his own. We knew far more about them than they did themselves, for one after another the members of the various French services would come to tell us of this or warn us about that, things which they personally did not approve of.

The most inconspicuous member of the Soviet delegation in Algiers was a round-eyed, round-headed, round-shouldered, potbellied little man who, in spite of his rank of general, was always somewhere at the back and passing completely unnoticed at the official ceremonies, galas, reviews, and receptions without which Algiers would never have been such a glorious information center.

We occasionally wondered just who he was and why he was there. I knew his name from having played chess with him at the Hotel Aletti down by the port, where the Russian delegation was lodged. The fact that I should spend some of my evenings playing chess with the Russians worried different intelligence services, for, as can easily be imagined, not one of the Russians' moves passed unnoticed, and people having anything to do with them or visiting them immediately became suspicious. Others were convinced that I was planted there, working for the good cause. The truth is that I loved a good game of chess, and Russians are mostly keen and sometimes excellent players; they, too, no doubt had their doubts about my coming round so often, but since I never asked any questions and merely sat down in front of whoever felt like a game they were quite pleasant. General Rachine was one of their best chess players, and only once was I able to draw with him, a feat which attracted all his colleagues and for which he stood up, bowed, and shook hands with me.

One fine day, however, much to everyone's surprise, General Rachine appeared at the head of the Russian delegation at an official function, a function at which an "aid-to-Russia" tank, the first of a series, was to be handed over. General Rachine seemed even rounder and smaller in the splendid blue and white uniform with the extra-flat cap and the extra-rigid epaulets.

The tank went up and down at various speeds, backed, turned, waltzed, kicked up clouds of dust, and made a lot of noise before finally stopping in front of the watery-eyed, coughing group of Allied officers in their Sunday best. Someone then made a speech which was duly translated into Russian by the official interpreter. General Rachine smiled, bowed, and said a few words. All turned toward the interpreter who said:

"General Rachine thanks you and wants to know if he may now examine the tank a little closer."

A minute later he had clambered up and disappeared into the turret with the interpreter. Again the tank roared, jerked off at speed, and went through all its tricks before again coming to a standstill before the group of Allied officers. Sweating a little, General Rachine emerged and again said a few words.

"General Rachine thanks you and would like to know if the tank can now be taken to pieces," translated the interpreter.

"Why, yes . . . but . . . tell the general he will be given all the necessary documentation," answered an embarrassed colonel.

"Yes, but General Rachine says he will understand so much better if he may take the tank to pieces. If the official ceremony is over it might perhaps be taken to some workshop?"

The delegation sighed with relief, and the tank was promptly driven into one of the empty hangars of a nearby airfield.

There General Rachine took off his cap, his tunic, and set to work with two mechanics. After a first detailed exam which lasted over an hour and a half General Rachine asked for a crane.

The amount of things that can be extracted from a tank is quite astonishing, proportionately far superior to what I was able to pull out of Mother's alarm clocks when a child. For two whole days General Rachine pulled the tank to pieces. Now and again, when Allied officers came to see how he was getting on, he would emerge from

the tank, wipe his hands on his long gray overalls, and smilingly extend a relatively clean little finger. Diving back into the entrails of the tank, he would reappear a few minutes later with yet another part, which he would number with a piece of chalk, examine carefully, set down with a heap of other parts, pull out a thick greasy notebook and jot down, now a few words, sometimes a whole paragraph.

Every night General Rachine arrived very late at the Hotel Aletti, long after the other members of the Soviet delegation had dined. Every morning he left at sunrise, carrying a basket of food which he put into the waiting car before climbing in next to the driver. Sunday came round, but it was not Sunday for General Rachine, who that day worked straight through the night to the Monday morning, just a week since he had first seen the tank.

The stack of parts large and small had dwindled to nothing, and the tank again looked like a real tank. General Rachine clambered slowly into the driver's seat at the front and pushed on the starter; the engine coughed twice, then roared as only a tank engine can roar.

The next day the official interpreter returned untouched the seven-pound stack of documentation concerning the tank.

"With General Rachine's compliments and thanks. He will not need all this. He has seen for himself and has taken notes," he explained.

"Wouldn't be surprised if those guys one day get to Berlin ahead of us," said a major who, having foolishly bet that the tank would never work again, had lost a respectable number of dollars.

37

Had it not been for Madame Guyot, there is little doubt that I would have ever seen a performance of the ballet of the Algiers Opera, which would have been a great pity.

In the simple but comfortable three-room flat which she occupied Madame Guyot must have had a good deal of trouble in making ends meet, for she had to live on her widow's pension, a very small one indeed. Parisian born, Madame Guyot had lived in Algiers for over forty years. She had married an artist who had made quite a name for himself at the Algiers Opera, where for many years he had designed and painted all the scenery, but never once had they been able to afford a trip to Paris, and forty years without seeing Paris is a very long time indeed for anyone, let alone a Parisian.

When I first called on Madame Guyot to see the room she had to let she assured me that it was only out of patriotism and because she had heard that Allied officers had difficulty in finding decent lodgings that she had finally made up her mind to let one of her rooms, and of course she would only take in a most respectable officer. Since the room was clean, cool, and airy, with a balcony facing the sea, and since I seemed to fill the bill of respectability mentioned by Madame Guyot I accepted without discussion the very modest rent which she had hesitated to ask for, no doubt considering it rather on the high side. She was so pleased at having found a lodger that she invited me to dine with her the next day. Having accepted her invitation, I had a bunch of roses sent round with my luggage the next morning.

Madame Guyot did not often have guests, and I rather suspected

that the long white tablecloth was one of her best bed sheets. Blushing with pleasure, her rather plump body compressed into an old-fashioned corset that pushed her breasts up to a remarkable height, with one of my roses pinned to her waist, my new landlady made me sit in front of a monumental vase full of my other roses and round which I had to dodge in order to keep up the conversation throughout the excellent dinner which she served up.

We soon became excellent friends, and after her first shyness had worn off she became a real mother for me. She never asked any questions concerning my work but always waited for me to come in before going to bed. She was terrified of the air raids, which were particularly noisy though not very dangerous; Italian bombers generally kept well out of reach of the anti-aircraft guns all round Algiers and contented themselves with dropping most of their bombs well out at sea. On one or two occasions, however, we were honored by German aircraft, and that was rather more dangerous. Whenever the sirens started up in the night, the drill was always the same. Madame Guyot would come and knock at my door:

"*Monsieur le Capitaine!* We must go down to the cellar!"

"No, thank you, Madame Guyot. You go. I prefer to die in bed."

It was not that I was brave, quite on the contrary. I had once had the heartbreaking job of dragging some sixty corpses out of a public shelter in England after it had received a direct hit. After that I would have gone anywhere but in a shelter during a raid.

Madame Guyot would then sit on a chair in the corridor separating my room from the rest of the flat, pull down a tin pail over her head, and cling desperately to her cat, much more terrified of the pail on her head than of the gunfire.

She often talked about the wonderful galas at the Opera, years ago, when Monsieur Guyot had been perhaps the most famous artist in the whole of North Africa. She could talk for hours about the glittering lights, the box of the Governor General, the splendid uniforms, the fine ladies arriving in open carriages drawn by the most beautiful Arab thoroughbreds. In those days all the most famous singers from Paris, Naples, Milan, and even New York were to be heard at the Algiers Opera. Madame Guyot had heard the great Caruso singing in the center of Monsieur Guyot's scenery; she had also seen the Pavlova

dance in front of a lake which Monsieur Guyot had designed and painted in less than a week!

It was some time later, when passing by a dingy little theater, that I realized with a shock that it was not just any theater but the Algiers Opera House. I had passed by it dozens of times without ever taking any notice. People were lining up at the booking office, by a large poster announcing that the ballet would perform, as in the past (and like the Paris Opera), every Wednesday evening and that an exceptional gala performance would take place the following Sunday afternoon.

Having secured a box for this gala performance, I invited Madame Guyot, explaining that we would dine at my mess afterward.

"How lovely, how grand! But I cannot, I'd never dare. With all those officers, *Monsieur le Capitaine,* it is impossible! No, I have nothing good enough to wear," she laughed and cried, and as I insisted she finally accepted both my invitations.

Next morning I caught sight of Madame Guyot at Elysées-Couture, one of the fashionable dress shops of Algiers, and on coming home for a shower and a nap after lunch I found a girl delivering a large hatbox. This worried me rather, for I could not help feeling that Madame Guyot was probably digging quite a large hole in her savings in order to make herself *présentable.*

On the night before the great day I found that Madame Guyot had cleaned and pressed my newest uniform, the buttons of which were shining and dazzling like every brass object in the flat. In my wardrobe I found a shirt and a collar beautifully ironed and starched. The very thought of a stiff collar made me feel faint. We were in July, and summertime in North Africa, even by the sea, can be very hot indeed, too hot for walking naked-footed across a beach, for instance; in spite of my tropical shorts and shirts, beads of sweat were liable to run off the tip of my nose when reading or to drip from my hands when writing. The only way to fight the heat was to try to forget about it and to live as quietly and as coolly as possible; drinking was of course fatal. Madame Guyot had taught me how to pin and stretch the top sheet of my bed so that it barely touched me and how to sprinkle it with water before going to bed; she also showed me how, during the noonday heat, to pin up thick woolen blankets over my closed

window. I knew that going to the Opera in my uniform was going to be quite an ordeal, but, come what may, I would not disappoint my landlady.

Madame Guyot seemed worried next morning when I appeared in my shorts but was soon reassured when I explained that I would be back in time to change before taking her to the Opera.

She was ready and fully dressed when I came in after lunch, and I realized that the jeep was quite impossible. The long black lace dress, the hat with the feathers, and the fox fur dangling over her shoulder would simply never do in the jeep, even supposing that the hat did not fly away in the first hundred yards. We would simply have to walk slowly along under the arcades.

"Aren't you wearing your lovely strap?" asked Madame Guyot.

"I suppose it would be better for the Opera," I said submissively, taking off my cloth belt and buckling on my Sam Browne.

By the way Madame Guyot came down the stairs in her new shoes I decided that walking was also out, so we took a taxi by the post office.

No sooner had we taken our seats in the pale blue (that had once been dark blue) velvet- and satin-lined box than the orchestra struck up and the curtain rose on a scene painted by Monsieur Guyot many years ago, representing a park with trees and statues bathed in a sort of shimmering blue moonlight.

One after another the statues jumped lightly off their pedestals, and the *corps de ballet* swung into action to the strains of a Viennese waltz. Shamefully forgetting my guest, gripping the moth-eaten velvet balustrade of our box, I stared in amazement.

The *corps de ballet* consisted of eight smallish, rather stout and sturdy dancers, plus one, much taller and remarkably bony, with a footballer's kneecap that kept slipping down her left leg. The *Danseuse Etoile*, easy to spot since she alone wore a tiara, had the legs of an all-in wrestler having spent his early childhood sitting astride a barrel or perhaps riding elephants bareback. Her partner, the only male dancer, seemed to spend most of his time running along behind in a flat-footed sort of way. Now and again all the dancers stopped and held their breath while he gathered speed for a leap which, somehow, never quite coincided with the music but which invariably shook all of Monsieur Guyot's scenery.

"It is quite moving to see those dancers in my husband's scenery," said Madame Guyot with a tear in her eye, after the curtain had narrowly missed the *Danseuse Etoile*. "What do you think of it, *Monsieur le Capitaine?* It is not of course what it used to be."

"It is superb. I have never seen anything like it. No one will believe it," I said, wiping away my tears.

"You are not very generous. Their dancing is not so bad, really."

Each ballet ended in a sort of *tableau vivant* (*tableaux vivants*, pronounced "tab-locks, vive-ants," was the great indoor sport of nice, pronounced "naice," young ladies toward the end of the reign of Queen Victoria). The dancers, suddenly immobile and giving the impression that the maestro had forgotten to play the last eight bars, had to wait for the end of the applause, often making fearful efforts to stay on one toe or in any other awkward position necessitating a fine sense of equilibrium.

Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty*, in two parts, was the *pièce de résistance* of the gala.

In the center of more scenery designed by Monsieur Guyot, this time apparently inspired by the bay of Naples, Windsor Castle, and Grand Central Station in New York, stood an enormous pink bed reminiscent of Napoleon's tomb in the Invalides in Paris. All round it and for no apparent architectural—or, come to that any other—reason, a pink marble colonnade complicated things badly.

The Beauty hopped around on her own at first, then, gradually, considerably handicapped by the colonnade, the courtiers arrived and gathered round. With a crash of cymbals that had nothing to do with Tchaikovsky's music, the Wicked Witch arrived and vigorously damned and cursed one and all for not having been invited to the Beauty's christening which, from what I could see of the Beauty's features, must have taken place a good fifty years before. Having thus struck everyone dumb with surprise and fear, the Wicked Witch rushed out and reappeared five seconds later as a Palace Guard, and since the tall skinny dancer was nowhere to be seen amongst the courtiers it was easy enough to guess who was the Wicked Witch-Palace Guard.

The Princess grinned, shrugged her fat shoulders, and again started her capers, which promptly set everybody off playing hopscotch and

hide-and-seek around the colonnade. This lasted until the Princess finally managed to prick her finger with the distaff which she had so far been handling like a French traffic cop his baton. All the courtiers immediately went to sleep in the most graceful positions imaginable, including the Palace Guard, who had just accidentally stuck the end of his halberd through a pink marble pillar.

The curtain dropped on this magnificent scene, and all the dancers came forward to bow when the curtain rose again and again under the tremendous applause.

The second act found everyone again asleep in the most graceful positions imaginable. After the spectators had had time to applaud again this delicate representation of deep sleep, the flat-footed male dancer made his appearance as Prince Charming, a Prince Charming apparently so shortsighted that he had to go and touch noses with every sleeper on the stage before at last taking the slightest notice of the Sleeping Beauty reclining on the pink catafalque from which one of her arched legs hung gracefully.

There again Tchaikovsky certainly never imagined the sort of half polka, half country waltz that followed the awakening of the Sleeping Beauty. With Prince Charming trailing behind and never quite catching up with her, she pranced madly around, awakening all her courtiers and the Palace Guard by poking them or whacking them with her distaff, causing them to dash wildly in and out of the marble colonnade. And when, at last, the Palace Guard and Prince Charming collided head on, I had to bite the velvet balustrade in front of me to stifle my screams.

The dinner at the Hotel Cornouailles was an entirely different sort of success. The colonel was struck dumb and hardly touched his food, but everyone was charming with my guest, who found American ice cream really wonderful.

Of course I had told my colleagues about the ballet, and a few days later I was told that John Steinbeck, who was among us just then, had solemnly assured the colonel that my guest was none other than the *Danseuse Etoile*.

38

"Lieutenant Roze!"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do before joining the army?"

"I was a singer, sir."

"Yes, I know," drawled Colonel Preston, sipping his coffee after an enormous plateful of vanilla ice cream.

Twice a week we were each allowed to bring a guest to dinner at our mess of the Hotel Cornouailles, and an invitation to the P.W.B. mess in Algiers was much prized in those days. It was not that the food was excellent or the colonel a particularly brilliant host, but the P.W.B. men were among the best informed of what was going on in the world, and the majority of guests were extremely smart at making people talk without asking too many questions. And also people such as Saint Exupéry, John Steinbeck, Max Pol Fouché were to be seen there quite often.

To make those dinners still more agreeable the colonel had hired four musicians who, perched high up on the other side of the entrance lobby, played for us throughout the evening.

Guests of honor, those who enjoyed themselves least, were of course seated at the colonel's table. He always listened solemnly, nodded, smiled, and occasionally, when he recognized a tune played by the musicians, beat time with his fork, his spoon, or his cigar.

Now of course we knew why Lieutenant Roze had that night been invited to sit at the colonel's table.

"Gentlemen," said the colonel, smiling round at his guests—and

when he smiled the lower part of his face seemed to swell out—"Gentlemen, I must tell you a little story. Quite by accident, when looking through the files of my personnel this morning, I discovered that Lieutenant Roze was a singer of the New York Metropolitan Opera. I feel he might have told us that sooner, don't you think?"

Even if he only belonged to the chorus Roze must have had quite a good voice, and for the first time I noticed that in spite of his small stature, he had the natural deportment and poise of the born actor. Of Italian parents, he had been incorporated in P.W.B. in view of the forthcoming Italian campaign.

"What did you sing, Roze?"

"Tenor, sir."

"No, I mean . . . what songs did you sing?"

"Italian opera mostly, sir."

"Such as *bel canto?*"

"That is just a style, sir, a style which only very great artists dare adopt at the Metropolitan," said Roze, smiling.

"Well, we have an orchestra here. Suppose you sing us something?"

"But, sir—— I haven't sung for over a year . . . And besides, I haven't any music . . ."

"Sergeant Brown! Run up to my room, please. You will find some music on my dressing table; bring it to me," snapped Colonel Preston, glancing at Lieutenant Roze out of the corner of his eye, exactly as my mother used to when I had dropped some jam on the tablecloth. "It is 'Roses of Picardy'; the orchestra plays it quite often, and I happen to have the music with the words," he added.

"But, sir . . . I have never sung that . . . that song," muttered Lieutenant Roze, flushing.

"Surely it should be child's play for you. You sing alone there, it is not like opera when you have people singing other tunes at the same time, is it?" said the colonel with a kindly smile that would have put the fear of God into most men.

"Your dinners are most entertaining," remarked my Parisian guest. "You are lucky to be under the orders of a man who so appreciates music."

Stiff and white with rage, Lieutenant Roze took the music which

Sergeant Brown had brought down and went over to confer with the musicians.

At a sign from the colonel all the servants had frozen stiff against the wall, and after he had glared round once or twice the guests had softly put down their knives and forks and sat waiting silently, much as the Romans must have sat waiting for the gladiator to die.

The sheet of music trembled in Roze's hands, anger more than stage fright, I rather suspected. For a fraction of a second, as he looked over his shoulder when the musicians played the opening bars, we thought that he was going to run for it; he certainly would have, had he not been in uniform.

Then, pure, warm, magical, his voice flowed without any sort of effort. Every song hit has, I suppose, somewhere in it, a touch of good music; be that as it may, for the first time in my life I heard a very hackneyed and very ordinary song suddenly transformed into something of great beauty. Africa, Algiers, England, war, worries, all had momentarily disappeared; nothing really existed outside of the enchantment of a simple song, nothing mattered any more. From the hall porter to the French general sitting at the colonel's table, we had all ceased living; hardly breathing, we were only conscious of Roze's voice, the beautiful, easy, flowing velvet voice that held us in a spell. The four musicians were no longer scraping a musical accompaniment to the noise of people dining, they were playing as they had most likely never played before.

It was a triumph, and smiling, blushing, and bowing like a beginner, Lieutenant Roze finally came back to the colonel's table.

"Funny," said Colonel Preston, "I would never have thought that 'Roses of Picardy' could be sung like that."

At that moment I realized that for the first time the colonel had not beaten time with his fork or his knife.

"The gods punished him by leaving him on earth," whispered my guest, who had also noticed.

In less than a week the story had gone round Algiers, and the inevitable happened. A great gala was being organized at the Opera for the benefit of the French Red Cross; there was to be a special performance of *Carmen*. A delightful old lady called on Colonel Preston, and Lieutenant Roze, who had gone off to Morocco the day before

on some special mission, was promptly recalled. I happened to be in the colonel's office when Roze arrived two days later.

"Have a cigar, Roze. Tell me, did you sing Spanish opera as well as Italian? *Carmen*, for instance?"

"Yes, I have sung *Carmen*," said Roze with a smile and a worried look.

"Good. Then there won't be any difficulty."

"What is it, please, sir?" asked Roze with a wooden face.

"You sing *Carmen* tonight for a Red Cross affair. I promised you would."

Roze carefully put down the cigar the colonel had given him.

"Sir, will you please hear me through? After, if you still order me to sing—for I shall only do so if I am ordered to, sir—then of course I shall sing."

"Go ahead, Roze, I'm all ears."

"Sir, what would you say if you were suddenly ordered to attack the enemy with a new tank, one that you had never seen before, all the machinery of which would be entirely new to you, the guns different, and so forth? That is just about what you are asking me to do. I have not been able to sing for over a year, I do not know the other singers or even what language they propose singing in, I do not know the musicians, the conductor, or even if we can rehearse. Finally, I am under contract with the Met, and I am not allowed to sing in any theater, or anywhere in public, come to that, without first getting their agreement."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, sir."

"Roze, I understand . . . but I still want you to sing. Our job here is Psychological Warfare, and though you did not join up to sing, believe me, it so happens that your singing is today of psychological importance, part of the war effort."

"I see, sir. Is it . . . an order?"

"It is an order, Lieutenant," said Colonel Preston, getting up.

Roze snapped to attention, saluted, almost stamped his about-turn like an English Guardsman, and walked out, leaving the colonel's cigar on the edge of the desk.

There was a fine to-do backstage at the Opera that night. The

local tenor had had wind of the disgraceful way in which he was supposed to let a banjo-playing cowboy—unless it was a red Indian full of feathers—sing in his place. For once in his life that he was given a chance of singing to a full house, he would just surrender his dressing room and . . . no, never! And he had locked himself in.

Carmen, who was somewhat on the stout side and had a bluish stiff upper lip that seemed to indicate that she shaved fairly often, was all for the American singer. Even though she had never heard him or seen him, even though he might perhaps sing with his mouth full of chewing gum or just loud enough to drown her and draw all the applause, at least he would not shout garlic at her. The rest of the troop, all of whom thoroughly hated both the local stars, were more or less neutral.

Lieutenant Roze had managed to get hold of the conductor and lock himself up with him and, stuffing him full of chocolate and cigarettes, had made him work all through the role which he would sing in English while the rest of the troop sang in French.

Artists are highly susceptible people, but the most susceptible of all are certainly opera singers and, among the male singers, tenors more than all. The Opera was already full of bejeweled women and a vast majority of men in uniform, the musicians in the pit were tuning up their instruments, and Roze, who had put on his make-up in the general dressing room with the members of the chorus, was now patiently waiting for the local tenor to open up his dressing room so that he could borrow his costume.

It took all the firmness of a French two-star general, all the diplomacy of an ex-ambassador, and, finally, the pleading of a very pretty and well-known society lady to get the tenor to unlock his door and to pass out, piece by piece, his Don José costume. Immediately after this decisive victory two expert seamstresses got to work on the costume in which poor Lieutenant Roze looked more like a fireman out of a Mack Sennett film than a brave Spanish soldier.

The curtain rose at last, only half an hour late, which is normal for any peacetime gala in France; the audience therefore did not suspect that there had been any sort of difficulty backstage.

As was to be expected, Roze ran away with the whole show. It was

more like a Roze recital than a performance of *Carmen*. He did, nevertheless, do his best to put his delighted partner forward.

No one off stage quite understood why, at the moment of going on in the last act, Roze swore that if ever he laid hands on the local tenor he would skin him alive and tear him limb from limb. In the audience everybody wondered why instead of neatly stabbing Carmen's opulent and heaving breast he grabbed her and stabbed her in the back.

Coming off after the final curtain, Roze did not deign to explain that the stage knife with the spring blade had been replaced by an ordinary butcher's knife.

39

"Very glad to know you, Captain," said the colonel in charge of American Security Services for Morocco. "We are short-staffed and handicapped for a good many other reasons, and I am very happy to have you with us. Oh, and here is one of your colleagues who has been with us for some weeks now and who will gladly show you around."

"I know Slim, sir. We have worked together before."

"Fine, splendid! Slim, see that he gets a PX card right away and lunch tickets for the mess."

"Knowing George, I expect you will find he already has all that," said Slim with a grin.

In spite of midnight bathing, salt pills and shower baths five times a day, the heat in Algiers had been getting really bad, and when I had been offered a transfer to Casablanca, which the Atlantic breezes keep reasonably cool, I had jumped at the opportunity. Also, staying alive in Algiers was beginning to be quite a problem. While on a spy hunt I had accidentally stumbled into a wasp nest, that of white-slave traders who were about to kidnap an American WAC. The French police, who were also onto this, were letting them go on with their preparations; they told me later that their intention had been to inform the American Military Police at the last moment, thus hoping to get rid of certain white-slave traders once and for all, for they had calculated that the MPs would shoot them all full of lead before handing them over. I spoiled the fun, however, fearing that if anything happened to the decoy girl the MPs and others might start shooting up the whole Casbah. Not realizing that I had probably saved most of

them from a rapid and violent end, the white-slave traders, two of whom I had had arrested while they were still spending a good deal of money entertaining their proposed victim, decided that I had not been playing the game and set their killers on me. Twice bullets had whistled by me as I was walking home to my lodgings after leaving the Cornouailles at night; another time three or four Arabs had run at me out of a side street, but a single shot had scattered them. My worst experience had been one morning when, having to change a flat tire on my way out to the Maison Carrée Airport, someone had opened up on me from a garden on the other side of the road. Having crawled into a nearby cemetery, I had shot it out with some invisible enemy for a good five minutes before a police patrol drove up.

"Much to do here?" I asked Slim as we walked out.

"In a way, yes, and it is sometimes rather complicated," he answered, taking me to the big European hotel facing the Medina, where he had a three-room flat which he had offered to share with me.

"Same as Algiers, I suppose."

"No, it is rather different. Can you, for instance, take a bed sheet from under a sleeping man without awakening him?"

"I know how it is done, but I have never tried."

"Well, that is a little the way in which I spend a good deal of my time, chasing beautiful ladies who get on too well with senior and even sometimes high-ranking officers."

"Slim! We don't have to fight vamps and Mata Haris? They don't exist."

"They do here, in a different sort of way."

We found the Americans wonderful organizers, and what I admired perhaps most of all was the wonderful way they had of slashing through any red tape or taking the right initiatives, but there were details of their organization which I somehow never understood. Why, for instance, did they have such a complicated and infinite graduation for anything supposed to be more or less secret? As far as I am concerned, a document, a message, can only be secret or not secret, but it cannot be only just a little secret or tremendously secret. That fine grading of secrets from "confidential" to "top-secret" always reminded me of the fantastic work that most American chartered accountants have to put in, whereas with simpler bookkeeping—— But

that is something else. Another American quality-fault (for it cuts both ways) which surprised us a good deal was that they would ever listen carefully to the voice of experience and then wade into things without taking any account of what they had been told, and with a marked preference for learning by their own experience. No matter how brave and courageous men are, wading into battle that way can, and did, cost a good many lives—such as when they found themselves in front of experienced German troops in Tunisia.

They were much the same about security. They listened to all we had to say but never, to my knowledge, took much notice; they preferred to find out for themselves. In England, for instance, in the American Security Service was a man of Polish origin whom we considered as extremely dangerous. In spite of all our warnings, he was given information that put us on tenterhooks but which he misused in such a way that we were at last able to have him sent back to the United States.

Slim, who knew all about this, told me with a chuckle that the same man after some weeks at the Pentagon had been attached to a high-ranking officer in Rabat to look after his security!

The first vamp I saw in Casablanca a few days later was, I must say, a disappointment. She was not dark-haired or green-eyed, she did not smoke Turkish cigarettes through a yard-long cigarette holder, and she did not walk around or sit as though she were about to die or fall fast asleep. She came up to our flat very simply.

"The latest flirt of the high-ranking officer I was just talking about," explained Slim with a chuckle after the porter had phoned up to say that a lady from Rabat wished to see him. "She knows that the minute I can I'll blow up her little game. She was the lady friend of the Italian consul who is now in Tangiers, but that is all I can prove. Some time ago I did manage to get her locked up by the French, but our high-ranking friend discovered where she was and fetched her out himself. She must think me more powerful than I really am, for she has not so far tried to get me transferred, and with the old boy she probably could if she tried, you know."

We were interrupted by a knock at the door and the entrance of a tall plump girl whose hair, dark at the roots, had been dyed a reddish brown that was perhaps supposed to be auburn. She would have been

rather beautiful, had her face not been so fat and so strangely vulgar.

"I must leave Morocco . . . I must leave immediately," she said, throwing down her bag on a table and sinking into an armchair before Slim even had time to introduce me.

"You can rest assured that I will not prevent you from leaving," said Slim, evidently surprised, "but, why the rush?"

"He wants to marry me!"

"And he does not know that you are already married."

"*Capitaine*, you know what he is like. He will kill me, or he will kill my husband. No, you must help me."

"How can I help you? He will still want to kill you if I tell him, don't you think?"

"Yes, I don't know . . . You could perhaps have me arrested again?"

"Bad as all that, eh?"

"Yes, he thinks I am not married . . . he asked me . . . and now he wants to marry me, and I am afraid!"

"I see. Well, look here, I'll help you on one condition: you leave Morocco for good!"

"Yes, *Capitaine*. How? When?"

"Come and see me tomorrow, and I shall tell you what to do."

"What are you going to do, Slim?" I asked after our visitor had left.

"I've got a wonderful idea," said Slim, already under the shower.

One afternoon less than a week later the lovelorn high-ranking officer received a mysterious telephone call as he was about to leave the lobby of his hotel in Rabat. It was a call from Casablanca, and he had run back to take it in the booth by the porter's desk. People in the lobby heard him shouting but could not understand what he was saying. A minute later he emerged with a face like thunder, and, dashing past the elevator, he flew up the stairs three at a time. Two minutes later he was down again, almost frothing at the mouth and shouting: "Get me another room!"

He had run back to his room where he had found the girl of his dreams, the girl he wanted to marry, apparently having a wonderful time in the arms of the officer who was supposed to look after his security.

The fake redhead had been able to hop a train for Tangiers that night; someone had been waiting for her at the station with a brand-

new passport and a Spanish visa which she had in vain so often tried to obtain before. The security officer had left for Marrakech by car that same night with a priority order of embarkation for the first available transport flying back to the United States.

"Pity such stories cannot be told," said Slim, finishing his whiskey before turning in, a couple of days later, after his return from a trip to Rabat.

"Maybe they will be told someday," I said, emptying my pipe.

"Could be, but what would be the use? No one would ever believe them, you know."

40

A few hours after the first Allied troops had waded ashore along the Normandy coast on the morning of June 6, 1944, a group of seventy men were awkwardly climbing down the rope netting hanging from a transport ship steaming slowly offshore. As the men dropped in twos and threes in the bobbing landing craft waiting to ferry them to a beach that seemed as crowded as Coney Island on a summer weekend, they could hear the rattle of machine guns and the explosions of the big shells fired from battleships still farther out at sea and that whined over them before sending up great mushrooms of earth and smoke on top of a cliff to the right of the beach. It was only later that they were to learn that the beach had been named Omaha. Most of them looked rather comic in their battle kit, and never before had any of them been under fire.

Those seventy men who had come from every walk of life and from far distant parts of the world formed the strangest fighting unit it has ever been my lot to see. They were a Psychological Warfare unit, and their arms were words, words which they spoke over loudspeakers facing the enemy, words which made a surprising number of prisoners during the Normandy campaign and which, therefore, saved a considerable number of lives. They were among the very first to win medals for gallantry and bravery in Normandy. And yet none of them had ever been near a battle before. The little fat corporal who seemed to have made up his mind to stick by me, come what may, whose English was still very hesitant, had once been the conductor of the Berlin Opera; he had reached Ellis Island as a refugee in 1936 and

was now back in Europe, proud of being a corporal in the Army of the United States. The sergeant attached to me was a professor of history and French literature in a big American university. Very few of those men were really fit for combat duty, and their training had, therefore, been more theoretical than practical.

Having been ordered back from North Africa in view of the landings, I had finally been sent down to an American camp near Bristol and attached to this particular Psychological Warfare unit. I believe that one of the reasons I had been put in charge of landing them was that I had seen fighting before and had had the experience of coming off a beach, Dunkirk beach, just four years and four days before. Needless to say that, knowing what being under fire was like, I was far more terrified than any of my seventy companions. Throughout the actual landing operations I kept my back turned to them, walking ahead, the only way I could think of making them believe that they were following a man not afraid or even worried. Afterward several of them told me quite frankly that they had found the experience not nearly so terrible as they had expected. In a way we were lucky, for we lost only one man, who very neatly caught a German eighty-eight shell in the pit of his stomach and who disappeared completely in one blind flash.

The first casualties were being carried into gaping landing craft that had just disgorged tanks and trucks as we made our way inland, up by the cart road that led to Saint Laurent-sur-Mer, where tired, sweating men kept throwing stones, faggots, wire meshing, anything they could find under the vehicles that were revving and roaring their way up.

We managed to reach our assigned position on the road to Cherbourg, and by the time Isigny was liberated we had received all our equipment of trucks and loudspeakers, including special ones that had been used in jungle warfare and that could carry a mere whisper for almost five miles. Our three immediate jobs were to interrogate prisoners, address enemy pockets of resistance, and give out daily news bulletins for the local French population. However, within ten days of the landings I was already turning out a daily news sheet pompously titled: *Liberator*. A little later a real newspaper was being printed in Bayeux.

Shortly after our arrival in Isigny a rumor came back from the front lines that a number of Japanese troops had been captured. The prisoners finally reached the compound where we had our linguists, one of whom could speak Japanese, and we soon discovered that the small, moon-faced, grinning men who could hardly speak a word of German were Mongolians. Captured on the Eastern front, they had been enlisted by the Germans as White Russians and were now delighted at having been again captured. Most of them ceased grinning, however, when we told them that they would be sent back to Russia. They were eventually repatriated, but I do not know what became of them.

A few days after the Mongolians, a group of Rangers suddenly appeared on horseback in the streets of Isigny, terrifying the population with their red-Indian screeches and galloping madly along the pavements; they had captured a group of Cossacks. Among them was one man who understood neither Russian nor German: the Cossacks did not know who he was or where he had come from; he was a good horseman and a good fighter, they told us. We tried every language we knew, and our group was able to tot up quite an impressive number of different languages, but he did not seem to understand any of them. We gave him paper and pencil, and he drew a cross to show us that he could neither read nor write. After two days, during which I began to wonder if he was not just having a grand lark and a grand time, getting cigarettes and chocolate from all those trying to question him, someone thought of Mr. Brown, a professional linguist in London. A few days later he was conducted into Mr. Brown's office. They looked at each other, and Mr. Brown tried various Russian dialects on him, then switched to a number of different central European languages and dialects until suddenly the prisoner's face spread into a broad smile, and for the next half hour he was gesticulating and chatting with the only man who had understood him since the beginning of his long and strange adventure.

He was a Bulgarian shepherd. During a blinding mountain storm he had one night lost part of his flock and had finally lost himself looking for his sheep. After wandering around helplessly he had been picked up by a patrol, probably a Russian frontier patrol, and simply incorporated into an army. He could not tell where he had fought, but he certainly seemed to have fought a lot before being captured.

With other Russian prisoners he had agreed to join up for service in the German Army, only vaguely understanding that he was changing sides but not caring very much in any case. Since his capture in Normandy he had been expecting to receive yet another uniform, a rifle and ammunition, and to find himself fighting yet another foe. He had a vague idea that by now every country was fighting every other country and that the only possible thing for a man was to keep fighting, regardless of who was fighting whom, the reasons, if any, or where the fighting was taking place. He told Mr. Brown that he was married and had several children, seven or eight, he thought, he was not quite sure, but he did not seem in the least worried about his family, who probably thought him dead. He had never heard of Paris or London, but he had heard of America; one of his distant cousins had gone to live there many years before. He had absolutely no idea of geography, and showing him on a map where he came from or where he was, was sheer waste of time.

He was not given a rifle, though he was given some clothing to replace his tattered uniform, and eventually he was sent home. His return to his native village must have been quite an event, and the chances are that to this day he still does not know whom, when, where, and why he fought.

41

By the end of July 1944 the battle round Caen had become as fierce and murderous as any since the outbreak of hostilities. The Germans knew that if they broke through Montgomery's troops and artillery the Allied landings were doomed; the Allies knew that if they held long enough the Germans would simply collapse. It was then that, farther south, on the Allied right flank, Patton and his Third Army smashed through at Avranches. It was as if one of two boxers in a clinch had suddenly thrown a right hook over his opponent's shoulder and crashed through his guard unexpectedly. The Germans were shaken, and before they could recover they had been thrown right back to the other side of the ring . . . on the Rhine. The Battle of France was won!

Since D day when, attached to an American unit, I had landed on Omaha Beach, at least once a day I had been to the map tent to watch our progress and the general situation throughout the country, for, thanks mostly to the French Resistance information services, we knew very exactly and almost hour by hour, what German units there were in the country, where they were, and their movements. The day we raced through Avranches I therefore knew that there was really nothing between us and Paris, nothing at least that could really stop us. The only question in my mind was: would the few German elements left behind in various places hold out to the last man, thus slowing down our advance, or would they simply melt in front of us?

English by birth, schooling, tradition, and a number of other pigheaded reasons that so often make us unbearable people overseas, I

am nevertheless a Parisian at heart. Paris is perhaps the only city in the world which a man can fall head over heels in love with; and it is not just any sort of love, but the real thing, the sort that lasts, certainly in my case until death do us part. In view of this, I considered it only just that I should be one of the very first to reach Paris. As far as I know, I was actually the first English officer in uniform to enter Paris.

My American sergeant, who was a professor of history, certainly knew French history better than I, but what he did not know, could not know was that we were living one of the finest pages of French history, since we were on our way to deliver Paris and nothing was going to stop us. From Avranches onward, the rest of the war, the world in general, all became unimportant. The moments we lived, the miles we covered were merely bits of the past that had to be lived over and over again; the future was Paris. Racing along the Brittany roads was a hazy dream through which I could see the Bois de Boulogne, the banks of the Seine. The shouting crowds of Rennes and Le Mans were but a vague echo of what I knew Paris would be. How long all that lasted? I do not really know; I had but one aim, one objective: reduce the distance that separated me from Paris.

Riding like some mysterious ghost ship on the long undulating plain, long before the roofs of the houses clustered round it became visible, Chartres Cathedral pulled me out of my dreaming. Less than a hundred kilometers from Paris, Chartres Cathedral, the largest jewel in the world, the cathedral that Péguy called his blue-eyed blonde and that he wanted in his paradise, Chartres Cathedral seemed frailer, whiter, and more elegant than ever. Unaffected by the rumbling of tanks and the barking of guns, serene and calm, smiling, it seemed, it had been hit by one single shell. I had seen the white puff as the eighty-eight shell tore and scattered white chips of precious stone, and I had sworn and felt the urge to kill. But it had been the last shot fired by a German gunner; a second later a tank racing round a corner had blown him into another dimension.

At Le Mans I had been assigned an urgent job to be done just as soon as we could reach Paris. My orders specified that with the command cars and the seven men, all volunteers, with me I was free to move anywhere, in any army zone, and that I was to be given every

possible help. My men were eager and full of confidence, and it was often ahead of the reconnaissance units that we advanced toward Paris.

We were among the very first to arrive in Rambouillet. The Germans? There had been plenty of them on the road, asking to surrender. On some stretches all we could do was make them drop their arms in the ditch on one side of the road and line up and wait on the other side so that the traffic could pass through unhindered. Now and again a machine gun, an entrenched company would put up a show of fight. They rarely held more than a few minutes, and we would move on, parking more prisoners by the side of the road with occasionally some wounded men to be picked up or some dead ones to be identified and buried.

Early on the morning of August 24 we sped past the Leclerc armored division roaring along the narrow Chevreuse road, black and slippery under the sort of drizzle that seems to consider that forty days might do for a start.

At noon, under a low gray sky, we stopped by a French armored car in the middle of the main street of Villebon, a small town south of Paris. No, it was impossible to advance farther, explained a young French officer; the Germans were dug in at the other end of the street, and he was waiting for reinforcements to attack them.

Their faces wet and cold, my men were munching their rations on the marble-topped tables of a nearby café. A sandwich in one hand, I spread my maps on the bar and watched the proprietor and his customers make dirty marks all over them as they pointed out the spots where the Germans were digging in. On the surrounding hills, like summer thunder, we could hear intermittent gunfire.

No reinforcements having arrived half an hour later, I decided to try another way and drove back toward Rambouillet, turning north three miles farther on a secondary road cutting across toward Saint-Cyr to the west of Paris. We caught up with tanks and trucks as the road got worse and worse and passing was almost impossible. Was this the spearhead that would finally reach Paris, I wondered?

At two in the afternoon we at last came out on a plateau with demolished hangars ahead of us. A look at my map showed that we had reached the Buc Airfield. Somewhere ahead a machine gun was bark-

ing viciously, and everything had come to a standstill on the crowded muddy road. On the edge of a little wood to our left, half a dozen heavy mobile guns facing Paris started firing. In the fields all round, people were beginning to gather in little groups round the war correspondents who had caught up with us. Escorted by two teen-age boys armed to the teeth, a long line of German soldiers, white with fear, their hands clasped on their heads, passed by us.

The rain had stopped, and the gray clouds were being slowly torn asunder under a beautiful blue sky. Shading my lighter over my pipe, I saw through my fingers a bright upright needle shining in the sun. Yes, it was the Eiffel Tower. I showed my sergeant, and a moment later the guns and tanks were crawling with men who had come thousands of miles to see the Eiffel Tower, among other things.

An ambulance came crawling onto the road, almost touching the shoulder of a heavy-bearded man who, standing in his jeep, was also squinting at the Eiffel Tower. Sitting by him, under an enormous American helmet, was a very pretty girl indeed. Shirt wide open on his hairy chest, as usual, Ernest Hemingway was as near as he could get to the fighting. The tanks started dipping off the road into the fields and spreading out in the direction of the destroyed hangars, and I could tell by the way he watched them that he would have loved to have followed. Starting up, I drove off after them.

Halfway across the plateau we suddenly found ourselves in the middle of a tank battle, the first I had seen. Stretched flat under our cars, we watched a line of German Tiger tanks advancing slowly toward us. The long necks of their guns spat orange flames, and a second later great mounds of heavy moist earth heaved up and dropped again all round us. On both sides and suddenly revving up with the impossible relative speed of toys it seemed, the American tanks went into action. A black cloud burst ahead of one of the German tanks and a second hid it completely, and in a maze of sparks and flashes and gut-shaking explosions it was put out of action. Another . . . and a third . . . and in a matter of seconds, it seemed, the battle was over and the heavy American tanks had slowed down again to a gentle elephantine pace.

The other side of the field an anti-tank gun was lying wheels up, curiously bent, like some strange dead bird. Round it men in green

seemed to be sleeping in the mud. One only was standing, legs apart, holding his bowels that kept slipping through his fingers; standing by him, giving him the last sacraments, a French priest was tracing a cross with his thumb on the forehead already moist with the sweat of death.

The enemy had simply vanished when we came out at last on a long empty road which I recognized as the Versailles-Villacoublay road. A mile farther on houses began to appear each side of the road, and from them people poured out to give us a first idea of the kind of reception that was awaiting us in Paris.

Though not quite Paris, it was already very different from the provinces. In certain parts of Brittany, where we had been the first to appear on the heels of the retreating German troops, there had been something solemn, religious even, in the way people had welcomed us. Several times I saw women holding up babies, probably so that in later years they could say that they had seen us with their own eyes even though they might not remember it, but also perhaps as the age-old gesture of gratitude and thanks. People running after us with glasses and bottles was quite a familiar sight by then. More solemn were the women standing on the side of the road holding out apples, tomatoes, the little food they had and which they thought might please us. In a small town at the corner of a street, sitting on a chair placed on an upturned barrel, a very old man had watched us going by, simply holding in his hands a slate on which had been chalked the word *Merci*. But Paris, I knew, would be something quite different.

We had reached the outer suburbs and were beginning to race past thousands and thousands of little houses, so different from the uniform monotony of English suburban houses. It is there that Parisians who could never really leave their beloved city but who yet dream of a country life build what they consider their ideal home, and that regardless of what their neighbors may have built. The occupants of these houses, who always somehow look like people on holiday, not like people who really live in them all the year round, were now pouring out and running alongside of our cars.

A hail of bullets whined overhead, and, pulling up sharp, we jumped into the ditch suddenly packed with people. A few hundred feet ahead

two American tanks had closed their turrets. Crawling excitedly round us, the people explained that a German tank had stopped to make a last stand on the corner of the road leading down toward Paris. A few moments later one of the Sherman tanks turned off the road, crashed through a garden, flattened a chicken run, waddled round houses and shacks, and, having found its range, suddenly opened up on the German tank. One, two, three shells exploded in quick succession, then the ground heaved as the German tank burst into a strange firework display. When we went by a few minutes later a blackened figure hanging half out of the turret was still burning. The road down to Paris was free.

Houses were getting thicker and closer together, and as lampposts and pavements turned the road into a street the houses began to grow into apartment houses. Vanves, Malakoff—we were less than a mile from the gates of Paris. More and ever more people had poured into the streets, which were now packed tight with a howling mob that seemed to have gone mad. Slowly, slower than we could have walked, we made our way downhill toward Paris; the crowd round us was so dense that I had the impression that we were no longer on wheels but floating in a sea of bobbing, howling, grinning, and happy lunatics.

At a turn where the hill became steeper the whole of Paris suddenly appeared in a bath of golden sunlight. Having grown considerably since we had caught our first sight of it earlier that day, slender and dark, the Eiffel Tower stood up out of the haze.

"Hurry up, the Parisians are expecting you!"

"They have been waiting in the streets for two days now!"

But it was impossible to hurry in a heaving, packed, frantic crowd where, for every turn of the wheel, fifty people had to each make a tremendous effort to get out of the way.

By a railway bridge a woman supported by two men was screaming hysterically.

"Stop! Stop a minute!" begged a sobbing boy who had fought his way up onto the hood of my car.

"What is it? Why?" I asked.

"Just a minute, so that my mother can touch you. She is blind, monsieur! She went blind the day after the arrival of the Germans . . . and now she can't see you . . . Please, monsieur!"

"Yes, but be quick."

"This way," shouted the boy to the two men half pushing, half carrying the blind woman through the crowd.

A minute later we were each of us being kissed and clasped by the sobbing woman who again and again ran her hands over my battle dress, my cap, my goggles, my face.

We were still moving slowly down toward Paris as the sun which had been reddening began dropping toward the hills of Saint-Cloud in the west. Montrouge? The Porte de Versailles? No, the armored cars ahead had turned left. We were therefore skirting round Paris, toward the Seine and the Bois de Boulogne.

By nightfall we had at last caught up with the first reconnaissance tanks that had come to a standstill by the Sèvres bridge, on the old Versailles-Paris road. The bridge was intact, and the road leading to the Porte de Saint-Cloud, less than a mile away, seemed clear. No, the tanks had had orders to stop; they were not to push forward in darkness.

Behind us, in the woods of Saint-Cloud, we could hear machine guns and the occasional dry cracking explosions of hand grenades. North of us, on the other bank of the Seine, green and red flares kept going up in the blue night sky. The Germans were everywhere signaling their distress.

I had our three cars drawn up under some trees by the bridge, and, having seen my men break open some rations and ordered them not to move before my return, I walked across the bridge. It was now quite dark, but ahead I could sense Paris holding its breath, ready for anything. Somewhere in front people were shouting and singing, and I recognized the "Marseillaise." The French national anthem is different from all other national anthems. The French would never dream of playing it at the end of a music-hall or cinema performance, but whenever they gather anywhere for political reasons—and war is of course a most important political reason—they are sure to start singing the "Marseillaise." On more than one occasion I have seen Frenchmen of different political opinions facing each other and singing the "Marseillaise" at each other much as in any other country men would have been shouting insults or even fighting.

There was not a light anywhere, but plenty of people seemed to be

moving about, and, hanging my helmet on my belt, I passed quite unnoticed through the crowd of singers and went walking on toward Paris.

"Halte, qui va là?" barked a voice as I passed the corner of a street. Two men stepped out of a doorway and flashed a torch on me.

"Bon Dieu! It's an Englishman! Then . . . it is not the Americans?"

"Yes, the Americans are there," I answered, and explained that I was merely attached to them and that I wanted to see Paris.

"See Paris? But . . . there is nothing to see. And besides, the Germans are still there, and you might easily run into a patrol . . . Well, if you insist . . . Come to our command post. We have a fine fat prisoner there, walking around in his stockings."

"Why in his stockings?"

"Bah . . . so that he won't run too far if he does try to leave us . . . and also because he had a jolly nice pair of new boots that just fitted my pal, who has been going around in slippers for weeks now."

The command post seemed well organized in the offices of a nearby factory. I was offered food and wine, and on a Metro map I was shown where the Germans were still holding out. Yes, there were plenty of them in the Bois de Boulogne; only the night before they had been executing people there. They would certainly not dare move out . . . If they did move? . . . Well, the resistance fighters would know and would come to warn us at the bridge . . . Go into Paris? Now? Yes, of course it was possible, but maybe I had better get into civilian clothes . . . no? All right, as I wished.

The telephone rang, and there followed an animated conversation.

"You have come just at the right moment," said one of the men, turning my way. "We are talking to one of our men at Levallois who happens to have a British airman in his flat. He has had him hiding there for the last three weeks; the poor devil does not understand a word of French and wants to leave because he can hear the fighting. Will you talk to him and tell him to stay where he is and that he will be delivered tomorrow?"

"Over the telephone? Is it not dangerous?"

"No, don't worry," said a fireman standing by me. "It is the automatic. Only the German lines are out of order; we cut them all two days ago. You can speak quite safely; no one can listen in."

It was strange indeed to pick up the receiver and talk to another Englishman in another part of Paris as quietly as if we had been in London in peacetime. I told him not to move and to wait for us next morning.

Accompanied by two men armed with rusty pistols which I guessed were unusable, I resumed my walk toward Paris. Avenue de Versailles, a barricade loomed up suddenly ahead. A few whispered words and I was pushed through a narrow gap by the side of the wall. On the other side a tall bewhiskered man kissed me on both cheeks, slapped me on the back, and we went on.

In spite of the darkness and the unexpected barricades made of torn-up paving stones, I knew my way. My companions certainly wondered why I stopped at the corner of the Rue de Passy and the Rue Chernoviz; I did not tell them that, twenty-five years before, I had been one of the little boys of the school facing us across the street, the little English boy who had once had to fight because, during a history lesson, Joan of Arc had been burned alive by his ancestors.

It was still dark when I got back to my men at the Sèvres bridge. One of them had very kindly unpacked and opened my old camp bed between two of the cars.

"Did you have a good time?" asked my sergeant as I slid into my sleeping bag for a few hours' rest.

"Yes, thanks. I had a wonderful time."

The sharp crack of a carbine woke me up with a start. Loosening my pistol with one hand and opening my sleeping bag with the other, I looked round. It was broad daylight.

"It's nothing, Captain. A few Germans out on the island in the river," said one of my men, presenting me with a mug of smoking coffee.

It was much too hot, in any case, and, picking up a carbine, I ran over the road to the side of a publicity column, from which I conscientiously fired at vague silhouettes that were now and then to be seen running about the island. Its turret turning toward the river, a tank moved slowly onto the bridge and started firing.

It was going to be a beautiful day. In a cloudless blue sky a bright August sun had risen over Paris. I decided not to wait any longer. My men were soon ready, and our three cars moved slowly over the bridge.

Paris was expecting us. The Porte de Saint-Cloud was black with people, and a great shout, a shout like the nearby football stadium had never echoed, went up as our cars approached. A first barricade across the entire width of the Avenue de Versailles brought us to a stop. People were clapping, laughing, shouting, or simply staring, much as children stare at wonderful unattainable toys. Some people were crying, with great tears running down their cheeks as they clapped their hands. The air seemed suddenly loaded with a strange emotional tenseness. Turning round, I saw a young American lieutenant who had come with us, crying like a child. By my side my sergeant kept repeating:

"They are mad, Captain . . . They are mad!"

Yes, all the people round us were mad. Bravo! Bravo! kept shouting thousands of mouths, as though we had won the round-France cycle race. Those who could get near us wanted to touch us, kiss us, shake hands with us. I even saw people kissing our cars!

Gradually, the movements of the crowd became more coherent, and without quite knowing how or why, for no one had said a word, the people turned to the barricade which seemed to melt under their bare hands. A few moments later we were able to pass slowly through. Half a mile farther on another barricade was already disappearing under hundreds of people crawling around like ants and pulling it to pieces.

And all the time there was that great, everlasting clamor of cheering and shouting people. Now and again there were great holes of silence, as though the sound track had been cut off in the middle of a film. Then people would simply look at us and smile, or cry, or both smile and cry, and a second later, like the sound switched on again, the cheering and the shouting seemed louder still.

Never shall I forget that frenzy of joy, of joy so great, so absolute that it becomes pain. Making our way up the Avenue Mozart was like a strange dream, of which one only retains impressions, flashes, but a dream that a man can surely only live once in a century perhaps.

Some of the Parisians, despairing of seeing us the night before, had gone to bed in the early hours of the morning, but the cheering crowds had brought them to their windows. Many, we could see, were still in their night clothes; even so, we found that the Parisian women had

still retained all their chic and smartness, and to us they looked wonderful as they smiled and waved at us.

Auteuil, so calm and quiet, so refined—even on prewar Sunday mornings when its pastry shops were full of customers in their best finery—Auteuil was throbbing with joy. The news of our arrival was traveling through Paris at the speed of sound. The barricades of the Avenue Mozart had great gaps torn in them to let us through. Like a strange daylight firework display, flowers were showering down on us from every balcony and every window. Thousands of amateur photographers were everywhere struggling and fighting to get pictures of us. Never had I seen so many pictures taken at the same time. And smiling foolishly, kissing thousands of happy faces, with lipstick stains up to our ears, shaking hands with both hands at once, we were happy and proud; personally, I was happier and prouder than I had been since the day of June 1940 at Dunkirk when, tired to death, I had left French soil by walking away into the sea and swimming out to a boat.

At the corner of the Rue de Passy and the Rue de la Pompe I hesitated; it looked as though the whole of the Paris population had started pouring along the Rue de Passy toward us. Accelerating into the Rue de la Pompe, we merely found ourselves in yet another sea of howling and delirious humanity through which we could only move very slowly. By the *mairie* of the sixteenth *arrondissement*, on the corner of the Avenue Henri Martin, the street was packed tight with people shouting: *"Mairie! Champagne!"*

A long line of policemen, the first I had seen, was moving slowly through the crowd.

"Bravo the police! Long live the coppers!" shouted people in the crowd, and for a short instant the mad joy focused on the men in blue. For a moment we were no longer the object of those screams of joy, of all those looks, all those tears, all those smiles. Those of us who had been to Paris before wondered why the police were suddenly so popular. Later we learned how they had gone into action against the Germans a full week before our arrival.

No thanks, no champagne for us. We had a job to do. In first gear we moved on through the crowd that got thinner toward the Avenue

Victor Hugo. We circled round the Place Victor Hugo almost deserted, and a bare half mile ahead, as massive, as imposing, and as handsomely ugly as ever, was the Arch of Triumph. I was watching people on top of it when a hail of bullets swept the street a hundred yards ahead of us. People who had begun to pour out of houses as we went by ran for shelter, dived into gutters, and crouched behind trees and lampposts like experienced soldiers. Swinging the car round with one hand, I drew my pistol. Already turning round, my sergeant had his rifle ready to shoot. With the perfection of a ballet movement, our three cars had veered round. Taking the lead, I went back as far as the Rue de la Pompe; knowing Paris well, I was planning on moving round the Etoile by side streets, and as I was about to turn right half a dozen cyclist policemen came after us.

"We were looking for you . . . At the *mairie* . . . a banquet . . . the people are waiting."

I hesitated a second. My men were hungry and tired . . . and my sergeant, who understood French, had a hopeful grin all over his face.

"All right, thank you. Go ahead, we'll follow you."

Again we drove through cheering crowds. Whistling like mad, the policemen had to get off their bikes to force open a way for our cars. The doors of the *mairie* were closed and the windows bristling with rifles; however, the police whistles acted as an "open sesame," and we rode into the inner courtyard.

There again, there were crowds of people, a little less noisy perhaps but just as happy as those in the street. Here, however, every other man was holding a rifle or had a pistol in his belt; nine out of ten civilian coats were being ruined by hand grenades and all sorts of ammunition weighing down all their pockets.

At the bottom of the grand marble staircase a young man accosted me. He was crying and in excellent English told me that all he possessed was mine. I was the first Englishman he had seen.

"Look, you will need money in Paris. I have on me a hundred thousand francs . . . Take what you need . . . no, take it all," he said, thrusting his pocketbook into my hands. "I know, I know, it sounds silly but . . . what you have done today . . . is . . . you see, I am but an individual . . . but you represent . . . do you understand?"

It was not easy to make the young man understand that I could not accept any money and that his gratitude was more than sufficient.

On the next step a wiry little old man had dropped a 1914 Lebel rifle with its yard-long bayonet to tackle my sergeant and clasp him in his arms.

"I have nothing, monsieur, nothing but this cross which I won honorably, under fire, in the First World War. Allow me to give it to you."

Not knowing what to say, my sergeant tried in vain not to take the Legion of Honor which the old man finally slipped into his shirt pocket.

Thus, step by step, we finally reached the Salle des Fêtes where, in past years, I had, as a newspaperman, had occasion to see many famous people married. On a long table glasses, champagne bottles were ready for us. All round, in the corridors, passing in and out of other rooms, people were carrying chairs and tables, boxes of ammunition, giving or receiving orders, and generally looking as if they were getting ready to sustain a siege. At all the windows armed men were watching. In case the Germans in the Bois de Boulogne should attack, explained a man offering me a glass of champagne.

We drank toasts to Churchill, to Roosevelt, to the King of England, to the French Republic, to General de Gaulle, to each other . . . No, the lunch would be served in another room, downstairs. Yes, of course, I would have time to shave . . . with hot water, if I liked. I liked.

An enormous juicy steak and fried potatoes, as only a Parisian cook can fry potatoes, and the fact that it was my first meal in dear old Paris certainly contributed to make that feast the finest of my life.

The windows shook as passing tanks came rumbling by, and, judging by the way in which the crowd was shouting and singing the "Marseillaise," I knew that they must be French tanks.

Coffee, cognac, cigars, more toasts . . . tired and happy, I at last gathered my men together by our cars. Escorted by armed civilians or policemen, "collaborators" were beginning to arrive. Pale and haggard, for the most part certain that they were about to be lined up and shot, they looked helplessly toward us. Having seen some of the things such men had done to other Frenchmen I am ashamed to say

that I could find no pity for them. I later learned that none of them had been shot, which is a good thing . . . I suppose.

We had to scoop the flowers out of our cars before we could climb into them.

"Not a war, a carnival," muttered my sergeant as we again drove out into the cheering crowds.

By evening we were installed at the Hotel Scribe, where the war correspondents were beginning to arrive. My job done, I strolled out as night was falling and found myself immediately surrounded by the people filling the street in front of our hotel. They had stopped shouting—most of them had probably shouted themselves hoarse. They were merely standing there, admiring our cars, our equipment, watching us, examining and commenting on details of our uniforms and our arms.

On the boulevard round the corner a small group followed me, much as Parisians love to follow a drunk being conducted to the police station, but the policeman I ran into on the corner of the Place de l'Opéra hesitated, then kissed me on both cheeks at the request of some twenty laughing girls who immediately set to kissing both of us.

Wherever I turned hundreds of people talked to me, now in fluent English, now in the most extraordinary hat-of-my-aunt school English. I knew that, had I spoken a single word of French, I would have been immediately kidnaped as my poor sergeant had been an hour earlier.

On the Place de l'Opéra I walked over to the white stone balustrade round the Metro entrance and, leaning on it, looked slowly round. Paris, at last! Four years . . . four long weary years, years of blood and tears, as Churchill had said. Very tired indeed, I had a vague, dream-like impression that it was all still a dream, that there had been no war, but that I alone had taken four years to get back to the Metro entrance of the Opéra.

A little, timid old lady, touched my sleeve.

"Opera . . . music," she explained, pointing.

Having thanked her, I walked slowly back to the hotel where, although the electricity had been cut off, I soon found my room, a very large one with an extra large bed.

Automatically—it is difficult to get rid of such habits—I slipped my gun under the pillow, but I grinned happily. We could sleep soundly. Tens of thousands of Parisians were keeping watch for us. For the first time since joining up I had the impression of being back home.

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